

» YOUR VOICE  
» YOUR LIFE  
» YOUR TRUTH \*

*\*Karen Leach, former swimmer from Ireland*

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## FINAL REPORT VOICES FOR TRUTH AND DIGNITY

Combatting sexual violence in European Sport  
through the voices of those affected

## **FINAL REPORT**

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Combatting sexual violence in European Sport  
through the voices of those affected

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## Foreword

by Gloria Viseras, former Olympic gymnast and member of the VOICE-Steering Group

In February 2015, I was invited to speak at the Final Conference of the project “Sport Respects your Rights” in Vienna. I was in the middle of a very difficult disclosing process due to the re-victimization I was suffering in my country. Speaking in public about my experience as a kid after more than 30 years of silence terrified me. In Vienna, I met Mike Hartill and Bettina Rulofs. Mike told me about his idea for an ERASMUS+ Project: the VOICE-project was to be a research project centered on the experiences of those who have suffered sexual violence in sport. The goal was to listen and to understand why and how abuse happens in sport and this could only be done by listening to those affected.

So for me the VOICE-project started in Vienna in 2015 and it changed my life. I was being victimized in my country for disclosing the abuse I suffered as a kid in the context of the Spanish Gymnastics National Team. But in Vienna I felt listened to, acknowledged and supported. It was on that day that I understood the true meaning of the word “**empowerment**” and it was right there and then that I found MY VOICE and I decided to dedicate all my efforts to protect other athletes from suffering abuse in sport. Every one of us who suffered sexual abuse in sport, has a story that can help understand how and why we still put children and young people at risk by simply enrolling them in sporting activities. Every story holds the key to prevention and that is why this project is so important.

I was delighted when Mike Hartill, Bettina Rulofs and Gitta Axmann set up the project structure and asked me to be part of the VOICE Steering Group. My role was to provide the “voices” point of view in the decision-making processes. It was a huge honor and a great acknowledgment for me. Sheila Tailor and Kevin

Murphy, from the NWG Network, were also in the steering group sharing their tremendous experience in protecting children from abuse and exploitation. Later on, two very important voices, Karen Leach and Colin Harris, joined about half way through the project.

In the first Steering Group Meetings and the first meetings with the researchers, we had many doubts regarding whether we would find “voices” willing to participate sharing their experiences. We were also very concerned about providing safe environments for them to tell us their painful experiences without triggering more trauma. How do we find people willing to participate? How can we keep them safe? How can we ensure confidentiality? How do we support them if we trigger flashbacks or distress?

And then, something really special started to happen. The “voices” started coming together to do interviews for the VOICE-project and getting involved. The voices were finding space to speak up in conferences and events throughout Europe. Some of us are now leading child protection in sport projects, some have founded their own charities in their countries and others are working with local and European governments on policy development.

72 voices from the UK, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Austria, Slovenia and Ireland have participated in the VOICE-project. We would have never imagined these numbers at the beginning.

Today these voices are promoting real change in sport.

I often say that we will only be able to effectively work on prevention if, and only if, we manage to understand the dynamics that allow abuse to happen in sport. VOICE has provided this understanding by studying the experiences of those affected and this will tremendously help on prevention in the future.

But VOICE has done something else. **VOICE has helped people.** Voice has provided a safe space for survivors to verbalize, some for the first time, the sexual abuse they suffered in sporting environments at all levels. VOICE has positively changed the lives of those who have participated in the project and will positively change the lives of those who will benefit from the results of this amazing research project in the future.

The project has brought survivors together and the connection has been deep and very powerful. This project and the people involved in it have helped us understand how strong we are together, how strong our voices are and how much we can help others by using them.

Personally, and as I said in the Final Conference, I thank the universe for bringing all these people into my life.

And now, with the VOICE-project coming to the end, this tight group of “survivors” are looking for ways to stay in touch and help effect real change in sport. We will not be silenced anymore and we will fight together to provide safe and happy sporting environments for our children and young people.

The VOICE-project has ended

The VOICE MOVEMENT has started

**Gloria Viseras**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background, Aims and Activities of the project

Freedom from harassment, violence, exploitation and abuse is a universal right and fundamental social imperative for all people, all societies and all sectors. An ethical sports environment is one that *proactively* upholds, advocates and secures the rights of all athletes – children and adults – and safeguards them from abuse and exploitation.

In those countries where sexual harassment and abuse in sport has been uncovered, there has been considerable public anxiety over the manner in which sport organisations have weighed the welfare of young people against their own reputation. This issue remains a significant threat to the integrity of sport.

Tackling sexual harassment and violence *in* sport and *through* sport requires not only policy development and implementation, but also greater understanding of the problem within sports communities. The need for activity in this area is illustrated by a range of high-level statements within the European policy context, as for example in Council of Europe’s Code of Sports Ethics:

*“Sports associations must protect children, young people and women against sexual harassment and abuse and exploitation ... [and] encourage national and international research to gain a better understanding of the complex problems surrounding the practice of sport by young persons, establish the scale of undesirable behaviour and identify the opportunities for promoting sports ethics.”*

Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) Council of Europe: The Code of Sports Ethics - Beyond the rules of the game

We would point out that a ‘better understanding’ would not exclude *men* from the problem of sexual violence, however, EPAS illustrates one of the starting points of VOICE – to better understand the problem of sexual violence in sport.

Over the past two decades, European countries have been shaken by revelations of child sexual abuse by trusted members of their community working within trusted sectors and organisations, including sport. General rates of sexual violence against children (and adults) in Europe are deeply troubling and must be addressed by all sectors. The Council of Europe states that one-in-five children are subjected to some form of sexual violence. The VOICE project started from the principle that the voices of those who have experienced sexual violence are especially important for both understanding the problem and for stimulating cultural change. Therefore, whilst this was a project initiated within the higher education sector, the voices of those most affected by sexual violence in sport were at the centre of VOICE from the start. A research study in seven European countries was undertaken in order to gather personal accounts of those who have experienced sexual violence in sport. Based on this and via partnership with sport organisations, victim support agencies and universities across seven European countries, the crucial process of acknowledgement and reconciliation was initiated in each country by installing what we have referred to as ‘Acknowledgement Forums’. The outcomes of the research study and the Acknowledgement Forums were subsequently transferred into educational resources for the European sports community, and are now freely available to all sport organisations in Europe and beyond.

VOICE was based on the following **AIMS**:

1. Improve the evidence-base relating to sexual harassment, violence, exploitation and abuse in sport through the voices of those affected;

2. Promote acknowledgement and reconciliation of sexual violence within sport organisations and communities with the help of the reports of survivors;
3. Develop authentic resources for the sports community to tackle sexual violence, based on the reports of survivors;
4. Improve the sharing of knowledge, experience and good practice on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in European sport by disseminating the project results.

In order to reach these aims the project was delivered in **6 Work Packages** (see figure 1):

The project commenced on January 1 in 2016 and ended on June 30 in 2018.

**Work Package 1** dealt with the *Steering, Management & Coordination* on national as well as European level.

**Work Package 2** delivered a European research study with 72 individuals who have been affected by sexual violence within European Sport. The study was carried out by each University partner in the following countries: UK, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Spain.

**Work Package 3** delivered seven national Acknowledgement Forums with key stakeholders from the sport and victim-support communities. 374 participants and 26 speakers with experiences of sexual violence in sport took part in these events.

**Work Package 4** delivered a European Workshop to exchange good practice on the prevention of sexual violence in sports. During this workshop 35 participants, including 'survivors', collaborated to develop educational resources based on accounts collected in the research study.

**Work Package 5** delivered the following educational resources:

- A. 7 educational movies based on the reports of those affected, translated in 6 languages (English, German, Danish, Dutch, Spanish and Slovenian). These movies are based on the reports of those affected and were feedbacked by 312 participants and stakeholders from the field of sport and victim-support. The movies are free to use and are downloadable via the project website: [www.voicesfortruthanddignity.eu](http://www.voicesfortruthanddignity.eu).
- B. 6 manuals accompanying the movies in order to support delivery in educational settings.

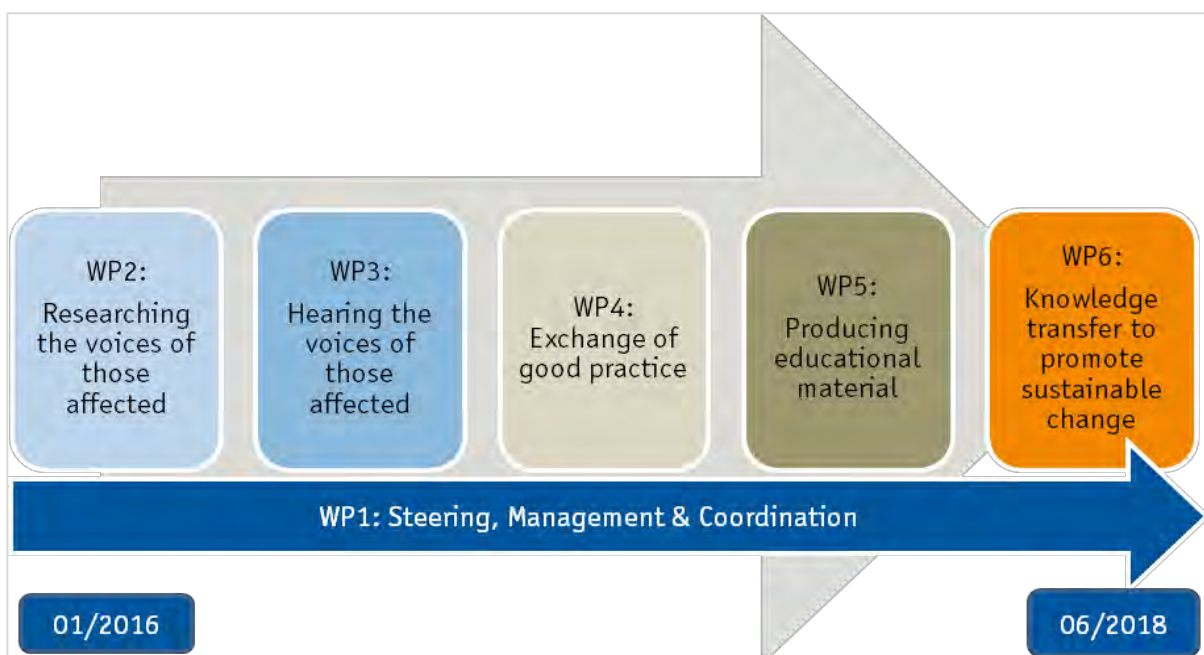


Figure 1: Work packages of the VOICE-Project

- C. A theatre-play, based on the narratives of the VOICE-project.
- D. A good practice guide for sport organisations on key actions to prevent sexual violence in sport and on how to work with survivors of sexual violence.

**Work Package 6** was principally delivered via a European conference, in Bergisch-Gladbach, Germany (3-5 May, 2018). 144 participants from 16 countries participated in the event, which created an outstanding atmosphere of acknowledgement of survivors of sexual vio-

lence in sport. The dissemination of the project outcomes is facilitated through an ongoing process. The whole project consortium is engaged in distributing the results to the wider European sports community to combat sexual violence, foster sustainable change, and to strengthen the integrity of European Sport.

Table 1 offers a short overview of all project activities. This report mainly focuses on Work Package 2, a research study with victims of sexual violence in sport.

**Table 1: Work packages of the VOICE-project and Activities**

WP	Title	Level of Action	Short description of Activities
1	<b>Steering, Management &amp; Coordination</b>	European & National	Steering, coordination, communication, evaluation, monitoring of progress, financial monitoring, reporting.
2	<b>Researching the voices of those affected</b>	National	A European and comparative research study with those who have been affected by sexual violence in sport in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, UK) including 72 interviews with those affected by sexual violence in sport.
3	<b>Hearing the voices of those affected</b>	National	7 national/regional 'Acknowledgement Forums' with key stakeholders from the sport and victim-support communities, including a total number of 374 participants and 26 speakers with experiences of sexual violence in sport.
4	<b>Exchange of good practice</b>	European	A European workshop with a total number of 35 participants to initiate/develop networks, exchange good practice, and create concepts for educational resources on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in European sport.
5	<b>Producing educational material</b>	National & European	The production of educational resources: » 7 educational movies, based on the reports of those affected, evaluated by 312 participants and stakeholders from the field of sport and victim support. » 6 manuals accompanying the movies in order to facilitate the usage in educational settings. » A good practice guide for sport organisations on key actions to prevent sexual violence in sport and how to work with survivors of sexual violence.
6	<b>Knowledge transfer to promote sustainable change</b>	National & European	The dissemination of the results, movies, manuals and good practice guide to the wider European sports community, e.g. through a final conference with 144 participants from 16 countries.

## 1.2 Project Consortium

VOICE was partnered by 4 European sport federations and a victim-support/prevention agency and was delivered in 7 European countries

through the collaboration of 21 organisations from higher education, sport and victim-support.

For an overview on the project consortium see the partnership model:

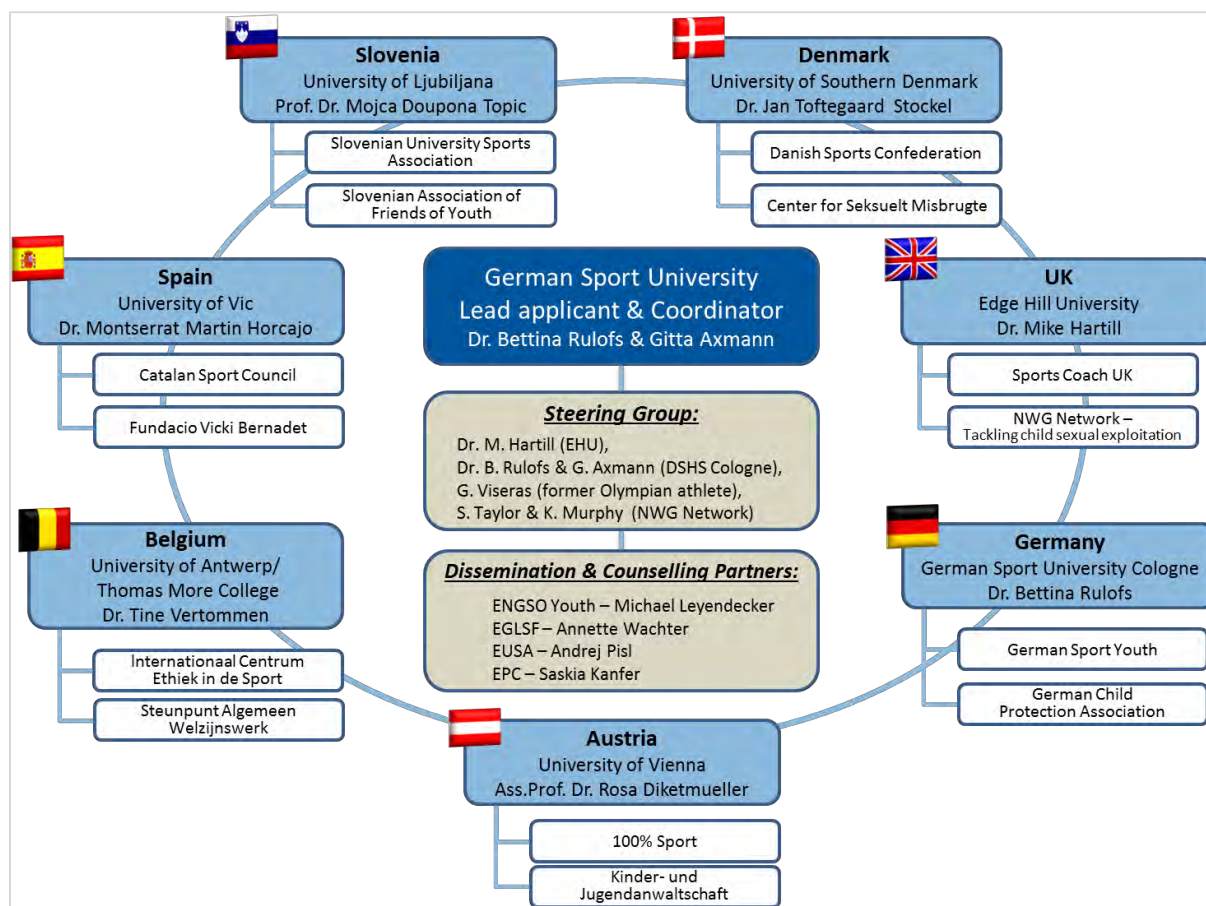


Figure 2: The VOICE-project-consortium

The German Sport University Cologne was the lead applicant and as such responsible for delivering, managing and coordinating the project. Dr Bettina Rulofs was leading the overall project and was closely supported by Gitta Axmann coordinating the project. Dr Mike Hartill (Edge Hill University), who had originally initiated the project, was also leading the project, especially in all questions concerning the research study. They were supported by a Steering Group that was counselling the lead and guarding the project implementation. Further members of the Steering Group were Gloria Viseras (former Olympic Athlete), Sheila Taylor and Kevin Murphy from the child sexual exploitation prevention and support organisation NWG Network in UK. Later in the project, Karen Leach (Ireland) and Dr Colin Harris (UK) joined

the group and included their experiences as former athletes and survivors of sexual abuse in sport.

Following the aims and structure of the project, the wider project team consisted of experts from 3 distinct areas: 1. university/science; 2. organised sport; and 3. victim-support/child protection.

### The university-partners in 7 countries

The university partners were responsible for delivering the work packages as they relate to the national level, e.g. conducting the research study in the respective countries (WP 2) and facilitating the national Acknowledgement Forums (WP 3). The respective research teams



included academics with many years experience of researching child maltreatment and sexual violence in sport settings. The leads for facilitating the VOICE-project on the national level were: Austria – Ass. Prof Dr Rosa Diketmüller; Belgium – Dr Tine Vertommen; Denmark – Dr Jan Toftegaard Stockel; Germany – Dr Bettina Rulofs; Slovenia – Prof Dr Mojca Doupona Topic; Spain – Dr Montserrat Martin; UK – Dr Mike Hartill. These national leads were supported by staff members from the universities, e.g. young investigators.

In order that the research data directly and explicitly benefit the European grassroots sport community *and* ‘survivor’ community, each university partner was working closely with a significant sport organisation and a victim-support organisation in their nation or region. This model of cooperation ensured that the project team in each of the seven countries comprised the relevant research expertise and infrastructure, as well as ensuring the sport and victim communities were strongly represented throughout the implementation.

All three groups were involved in the delivery of work packages, but with different levels of engagement according to the tasks being undertaken. Thus, sport and victim-support organisations were heavily involved in the national Acknowledgement Forums (WP 3), European workshop (WP 4) and production of educational resources, but had little engagement in the process of interviewing or production of research reports.

### **Organised sport on European and national level**

The European sport perspective was consequently represented by the inclusion of four highly reputed European Sport organisations (European Non-Governmental Sport Organisation [ENGSO Youth], European Paralympic Committee [EPC], European Gay and Lesbian Sport Foundation [EGLSF] and the European University Sport Association [EUSA]). The participation of these organisations ensured that

the project was grounded in sport and distributed to the relevant stakeholders. The selection of these four European sport organisations also correlated to the fact that sexual violence is a particular problem for young people, those with disabilities, and the LGBTI community. The four European organisations did take over the role as “counselling and dissemination-partners”.

On the national level, in each country an influential sport federation was subcontracted to the project (e.g. German Sport Youth, Sports Coach UK, Catalan Sport Council, Slovenian University Sport Association). They supported the project in disseminating the information on the interview study into their respective structures and in facilitating the Acknowledgement Forums as well as disseminating the outcomes into their structures.

### **Victim-support/Child protection**

The sensitive topic of the project required the continuous support from agencies that are specialized in the field of working with victims or protecting young people from violence. In order to include this expertise into the steering of the project “NWG Network- Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation” was member of the steering group. On the national level of VOICE the project was supported by national agencies dealing with victim support or the prevention of sexual violence (e.g. The German Association for Child Protection, the Austrian Association of Child Protection).

In the course of the project the consortium continually grew through the inclusion of survivors in sport who took part in the interview study, the VOICE-Acknowledgement Forums and further project activities. In many partner countries the so-called “voices” built up a communication group in order to inform and support each other.

Thankfully, some of the “voices” took over the role of ambassadors for the project, spoke out in public in order to promote the project, produced movies with the project consortium,

spoke at conferences and joined the Steering Group in preparing the Final Conference. These VOICE-ambassadors are: Gloria Viseras, Karen Leach, Ralf Zitzmann and Dr Colin Harris.

### 1.3 Terms and Definitions

The following terms were adopted by the project. Variations and adaptations were used according to definitions in national contexts.

The VOICE-project was developed in partnership with those who have expertise through lived experiences of sexual violence. Such individuals are sometimes referred to as “**victims**” and in some countries the term “**survivor**” is popular. We use these terms interchangeably as appropriate, but emphasize that self-definition is preferable. Further, in keeping with the principles of VOICE, we frequently use the terms “**voices of experience**” and “**experts by experience**” throughout this guidance.

»**Harassment** relates to unwanted attention or conduct, the violation of dignity and/or the creation of a threatening, hostile, intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

»**Abuse** implies that a person’s rights are violated or infringed by another. This is based on an abuse of power and trust.

»**Sexual harassment** refers to behaviour of a sexualised nature which is unwanted, exploitative, degrading, coerced, forced and/or violent.

Such behaviours may be verbal, non-verbal and/or physical. The examples of verbal harassment and abuse include unwanted or degrading intimate questions relating to body, clothes or one’s private life, jokes with a sexual innuendo, and proposals or demands for sexual services or sexual relationships. These may also be in the form of unwanted telephone calls, letters, text messages or other communication with a sexual content. The non-verbal examples of harassment and abuse include staring, ges-

tures, showing pictures or objects with sexual allusions. The examples of physical harassment and abuse include unwanted, unnecessary or forced physical contact of a sexual nature, such as pinching, pressing oneself onto the body of others, attempting to kiss or caress another person, sexual penetration and rape (Chroni et al., 2012).

»**Sexual abuse** ‘Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).’ (UK Government, 2013: Working Together to Safeguard Children).

»**Sexual Exploitation** ‘of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterized in the main by the child or young person’s limited availability of choice resulting from their

social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability' (UK Government, 2009: Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation).

»**Sexual violence** is used as an umbrella term for the above mentioned forms of activities including a continuum of different forms of behaviours from e.g. verbal sexual harassment without body contact over transgressive behaviours to sexual violence with body contact.

## 2. Research study with those affected by sexual violence in sport

### 2.1 Background and research context

Psychiatric research on sex offending against children goes back to at least the mid-1950s, however, the identification of child sexual abuse [CSA] as an important topic for academic research and political activism largely began in the USA in the 1970s when there was 'an explosion of literature' on sex offending against women and children (Finkelhor & Araji, 1986: 145). In 1978 the physician Henry Kempe, who had previously highlighted the issue of *physical* child abuse (the 'battered baby') (Kempe et al., 1962), declared sexual abuse 'another hidden pediatric problem' (Kempe, 1978).

In the UK, it is generally acknowledged that it was only in the 1980s that the sexual abuse of children became recognized as a significant social problem, however, the focus of public and political attention was very much on abuse in the family. It was not until the 1990s that attention moved to the sexual abuse of children in institutional settings following the exposure of many cases of abuse by adults occupying positions of trust in, for example, schools, churches, children's homes, and other organised settings for children such as the Scouts.

The first time the idea of sexual exploitation in *sport* is raised, at least in an official public

forum, is at the British Association of National Sports Coaches annual conference in 1986 (Brackenridge & Lyons, 1986). Prior to this, to our knowledge, there is no record of any discussion, within or without the sport sector, on this issue.

Sport in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (and beyond) was a male dominated environment that was frequently characterized by a culture of racism, sexism, homophobia, 'compulsory heterosexuality', hyper-masculinity and violence. Respect for and deference to authority, especially of the male coach with a record of success, was paramount.

Consequently, the research and advocacy of Celia Brackenridge and others, notably Kari Fasting, Sandra Kirby, and Peter Donnelly, was genuinely ground-breaking. However, this research delivered some unwelcome and uncomfortable messages for the male dominated governing agencies and boardrooms of sport as well as the (largely unregulated) coaching fraternity.

Therefore, until recently, there was little recognition of the potential for maltreatment within sport contexts, and safeguards to protect children in sport were overlooked or considered unnecessary (Brackenridge, 2001; Lang & Hartill, 2014). However, recent years have seen a growing interest in promoting children's rights and preventing child maltreatment (Brackenridge et al., 2010). This interest has been underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989) and by high-profile cases of abuse in sport across several countries (see Lang & Hartill, 2014).

Protecting children from maltreatment is one key strand in this children's rights agenda and stakeholders in sport, such as coaches, are named as key individuals 'with clear, recognized legal, professional-ethical and/or cultural responsibility for the safety, health, develop-

ment and wellbeing of the child' (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011).

### **Sexual Abuse in Sport**

In the face of skepticism, minimization and denial about the existence of child sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence in sport, lack of 'hard' data on the scale of the problem has always been a barrier to securing political action.

However, there have now been a number of attempts to measure the scale of sexual abuse within sport. One of the earliest studies questioned elite and recently retired elite high-performance athletes in Canada, finding that 22 per cent of the 266 respondents reported having sexual intercourse with someone in a position of authority in sport, including 9 per cent who said this was forced (Kirby & Greaves, 1996).

Brackenridge et al. (2005) analyzed 132 of the 152 cases opened and closed by the Football Association between April 1999 and August 2002. These referred to both current and non-recent allegations between 1967 and 2002, including allegations relating to incidents outside football. The study found that 14 of the allegations related to sexual abuse (10.6%), 30 to physical abuse (22.7%), 20 to emotional abuse (15.2%) and 5 related to neglect (3.8%).

More recently, Rhind et al. (2015) used a 15-item questionnaire with 41 UK NGBs in 2011. These NGBs recorded 134 reports (20.6%) relating to physical abuse, 124 (19%) relating to sexual abuse, 68 (10.4%) relating to concerns around criminal convictions, 66 (10.1%) relating to emotional abuse and 66 (10.1%) relating to bullying. The study also provided data on gender, finding that 91% of the alleged perpetrators were male, and in 65% of reports, the 'victim' was also male.

Hartill and Lang (2018) collected data on 1013

safeguarding reports to local authorities in England relating to sport and leisure settings, for a five-year period (2010-15). They found that reports referring to sexual abuse are by far the most common in relation to sports/leisure settings, constituting nearly 50% of the total reports recorded for the period. Reports categorized as relating to physical abuse constitute 20% of all reports; however, emotional abuse and neglect, combined, constitute just 6% of all reports received. For both sexual and physical abuse, the volume of reports increased each year in the five-year period with a particularly marked increase in 2014-2015. The sex of the individual reported – the 'alleged perpetrator' – was identified in 635 (63%) reports; 91% of these referred to a male and 9% (N = 60) to a female. 73% of females reported, and 70% of males, related to adults in the role of coach/instructor. Specific data on outcomes were provided for 507 reports of which nearly 9% resulted in a conviction.

However, due to significant problems of underreporting of sexual crimes, official reports are unreliable indicators of the true scale of the problem. Most attempts to quantify child abuse rely on retrospective surveys of adults' experiences as children. The earliest prevalence study of sexual abuse in sport was conducted in Australia (Leahy et al., 2002), where researchers used a legal definition of sexual abuse to question 370 elite- and recreational-level athletes about their experiences in sport. They found that 31 per cent of females and 21 per cent of males reported experiencing sexual abuse. Among females who had experienced sexual abuse, 41 per cent said this was perpetrated by a member of the sports personnel, compared to 29 per cent for males.

Another early study of athletes in Norway found 42 per cent of those aged over 23 and 17 per cent of those aged between 15-18 reported experiencing sexual harassment and abuse in sport (Fasting et al., 2003).

In the UK, Alexander et al. (2011) explored students' (aged 18–22) experiences of sport up to age 16. Around 75% of the 6124 respondents choosing to complete the survey said they had experienced 'emotional harm', 24% said they had experienced 'physical harm', 29% reported experiencing 'sexual harassment' and 3% said they had experienced 'sexual harm' (which included behaviours such as 'being forced to kiss someone', 'being touched sexually against your will', 'being forced to have penetrative sex' as well as someone exposing themselves) (Alexander et al., 2011).

Recently, more robust studies have been conducted. Using an online questionnaire with 4000 adults who had participated in sport prior to age 18, Vertommen et al. (2016) assessed 'the prevalence of retrospectively self-reported interpersonal violence in organised youth sport in Flanders and the Netherlands.' The study found '38% of all respondents reported experiences with psychological violence, 11% with physical violence, and 14% with sexual violence.' They also found that 'ethnic minority', 'lesbian/gay/bisexual' and 'disabled' athletes report significantly more experiences of interpersonal violence in sport. This also applied to those competing at the international level (Vertommen et al., 2016: 223).

In a study of sexual violence and elite athletes, Ohlert et al. (2017) found, from 1529 respondents (16 years and above), 38% had experienced at least one sexual violence situation (contact and non-contact behaviours) in sport and 11% reported a severe form.

In the only study of its kind to date, Parent et al. (2015) conducted a prevalence study with a representative sample of 6450 children – 14–17-year olds – in Quebec. For those in the sample considered to be 'athletes' (i.e. affiliated to a sports club), the prevalence rate of sexual abuse was 8.8%, somewhat lower than the rate of 10.2% for the general population (Parent et al., 2015) leading them to conclude that 'ado-

lescents involved in organised sport experience less sexual abuse during their life than adolescents who are not involved in organised sport'. Of those identified as *athletes* in this sample, 0.8% were sexually abused by a coach during their lifetime. A key factor in establishing prevalence of sexual abuse is the definition applied. Parent et al. (2015) did not include *noncontact* sexual abuse, such as exhibitionism and exposure to sexual acts, in their definition of sexual abuse, whereas studies that draw on widely accepted definitions of sexual violence (such as the UN) do not limit sexual abuse to *contact* behaviours.

### **Gender, Abuse and Sport**

Early research tended to focus on the experiences of female victims (Brackenridge, 2001, 1994) and research in the general population repeatedly shows higher prevalence rates of sexual abuse and exploitation for females, than males. This also appears to be the case in sport. However, Hartill (2009, 2005) has argued that the issue of underreporting is even more extreme for males. Interestingly, whilst in no way 'scientific', a telephone helpline set-up immediately following a 1993 BBC television documentary on abuse in sport, which included testimony from a male survivor, received roughly equal numbers of calls from males and females. Providing more robust support, Parent et al.'s (2015) recent study of children in Quebec found 'no significant gender differences in the prevalence of sexual abuse by a coach in the total sample or in the subgroup of current athletes' (Parent et al., 2015: 2680).

It is over twenty years since Plummer (1995: 56) observed that stories of "surviving" and "coming-out" "are coming out everywhere", yet the pace at which such stories have emerged within sport appears to have been somewhat arrested. This is perhaps especially true for male-sport and it remains that there is very little research focused on the sexual exploitation of *males* in sport. However, Hartill has previously conducted qualitative interviews

with male survivors (Hartill, 2017, 2014) and, significantly, in recent years autobiographical accounts from male “survivors” of sexual abuse in sport have begun to emerge (e.g. Leonard, 2011; Sjöberg, 2011; Moore, 2010; Fleury, 2009; Kennedy, 2006). According to Hartill (2014: 24):

It seems reasonable to suggest that these high-profile disclosures indicate that greater room has recently been leveraged within public discourse to enable some men to speak openly about their boyhood experiences of sexual violence and abuse.

However, differences between countries are also significant and in many countries there has been little or no attention to sexual abuse in sport and there ‘is both a denial of the issue and a lack of evidence-based knowledge’ (Fasting, 2015: 440). Furthermore, research in this area to date has predominantly emanated from high-income countries and has focused on the sexual abuse of athletes, particularly of able-bodied athletes; more research is needed from low- and middle-income countries and on other forms of maltreatment, including among the ‘disability-sport’ community. Therefore, the relative absence of stories of sexual violence from the popular sports narrative (and the relative narrow cultural range of stories currently in the public domain) represent a significant omission from the history of sport.<sup>1</sup>

It is our contention that a sector that is built from a partial history of itself, where the voices of the exploited and abused are not valued or even heard, cannot fully understand itself and, therefore, cannot possess the necessary self-awareness and clarity of vision required to undertake meaningful change. This situation prompted the foundation of the VOICE-project in 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> The recent media attention given to the allegations against Harvey Weinstein and other prominent ‘Hollywood’ figures, plus the media attention generated by the British ‘football abuse scandal’ and the USA ‘gymnastics abuse scandal’ emerged during the lifetime of the VOICE project.

## 2.2 Aims, Rationale and Research Questions

Since research with ‘survivors’ of sexual violence is still rare (especially where the research encompasses different national and cultural contexts), the overriding aim of the interview study was to understand the conditions and consequences of sexual violence through the perspective of those affected in sport. Specifically, VOICE aimed to uncover and articulate some of the complexities of sexual violence through a collaborative exploration of the subjective experience of those who suffered it. We wanted to resist and challenge stereotypes, myths and generalized assumptions about this population and their experiences which we have commonly found within the sports sector. We also aimed to offer insights of where systems and processes for protection failed in cases of sexual violence in sport, to learn about the cultural and structural aspects underlying sexual violence in sport, and to understand the effects on individuals and their life histories and trajectories.

The perspective of the participants (‘survivors’) is, therefore, predominant in this study. To some it may seem ‘unscientific’ to tell the story from the (subjective) point of view of the ‘victim’, indeed, the notion of telling stories as a scientific act may be unfamiliar or unappealing to some readers. However, it was not our intention to investigate or to establish the objective truth of ‘survivors’ accounts (as might criminologists, for example). Rather, we combine scientific and political projects without apology. There is no requirement or ambition to establish facts in the legal sense; we aimed to speak alongside – *with* – the sexual violence ‘survivor’ community in order to support this community in being heard within the corridors of power that govern sport, locally, nationally and internationally.

In addition, however, the narrative, life-history approach that we adopted, allowed for both an *in-depth* and *ethical* investigation. Our ap-



proach ensured that our investigation explored the problem of sexual violence (in sport) in appropriate depth and detail, but equally allowed sufficient time/space for our participants to tell their stories in their *own* way, to emphasize the things that *they* felt were important or significant. We argue this approach takes seriously both the problem of sexual violence and the individual whose life has been blighted by it.

We consider this to be an ethical approach to such investigations whilst acknowledging that the potential to cause distress is significant and that all attempts to mitigate harm in such research (such as ‘informed consent’) can never offer guarantees and should not be relied on, nor invoked, to do so.

Thus, the overall and leading question of the research study was:

### **How is sexual violence in sport reconstructed by those who have been affected?**

This main question was differentiated in various sub-questions which structured the interviews as well as the analysis:

- Which forms of sexual violence are experienced by children and young people in sport?
- What are the circumstances, dynamics, processes and socio-cultural structures under which sexual violence in sport occurs?
- Are any factors relating to sexual violence specific to (the different levels/types of) sport?
- How is sexual violence incorporated into the life histories of those who have experienced it in sport?
- What are the effects or consequences for the biographies of those who have been affected by it? How does the experience of sexual violence impact on those victimized?

- From the perspective of ‘survivors’ of sexual violence in sport:
  - What were the antecedents to their abuse?
  - What features of, or failures in, the local or national sport system, do they identify with their abuse/victimization?
  - What restrained/restricted the voicing of their experiences/feelings at the time and subsequent to cessation?
- What would have helped to prevent/stop their victimization?
- What are the key lessons for policy and prevention?

## **2.3 Methodology**

Empirical research on sexual violence faces many methodological and ethical challenges, in particular the challenge of securing access to those with a lived experience of sexual violence. There are clearly many reasons why individuals with a personal history of being subjected to sexual violence would not want to participate in a research project about sexual violence. These reasons range from straightforward lack of time or interest to concerns about confidentiality and their psychological wellbeing.

Research of this nature is highly sensitive and clearly must be subject to strict ethical procedures and protocols (Rulofs, 2016; Hartill, 2014; Brackenridge, 1999). The approach within the VOICE project was based on previous experience and best practice in the field. In addition, this process was informed by survivors within the VOICE steering group. During the kick-off meeting standards for the research project were defined with all the researchers from participating countries, including the perspective of survivors and victim support organisations. Based on this, a call for participants and an information paper were developed

in order to recruit participants. An interview protocol (see attached) was developed in order to support all researchers in the facilitation of the study. Furthermore, all researchers were required to seek approval from their ethics committee to conduct the study (see further information on this below).

### **Specific Ethical Considerations**

#### *'Victims' / 'Survivors' as Vulnerable Adults*

Ethical guidance for undertaking research in this context often refers to victims of abuse as a group that might be considered as 'vulnerable adults':

'They [...] possess some property which renders them more susceptible to potential distress or harm arising from their participation in a particular research procedure, than would be the case for the majority of the population.'

(Edge Hill University, 2018: 1)

Clearly, the specific objective of the study was to uncover highly emotive experiences which will likely be viewed as distressing, even traumatic, episodes in the lives of the participants. The value of research of this nature is recognised:

'It is recognised that a potential participant's vulnerability may often be associated with the research question of interest, and that research frequently needs to address the sensitive issues which can lead to vulnerability in an adult. Furthermore, adults who may be deemed vulnerable by the definition given here have as much right to volunteer to participate in research as any other adult, and may be especially motivated to do so when that research is relevant to the source of their vulnerability.'

(Edge Hill University, 2018: 2)

Following this, vulnerable adults are able to give consent to participate and there is no reason to believe that individuals who have been subjected to sexual abuse in childhood

'lack the capacity to decide, give their permission or consent to being involved in research' (Edge Hill University, 2012: 2); indeed it would be prejudicial to do so.

Nevertheless, the potential for doing harm exists within research of this nature. Harm may be caused by the exercise of talking to individuals who have experienced sexual violence (even by the act of contacting them); harm may be caused by interpreting their stories; and harm may be caused by the mere action of putting into concrete text (written word) an expression of their experiences that had previously remained (forcibly) hidden and unspoken (see Brackenridge, 1999).

However, the self-identifying nature of the participants may be a strong indicator of their resolve and desire to tell their story for the purposes of wider distribution and the generation of knowledge that may prevent further abuse. Thus, it is not unreasonable to consider that those who agree to take part will see the process as a positive one despite having to reveal, and to some extent re-live, very distressing experiences (Etherington, 2009). Whilst this is reflective of previous experiences of working with 'survivors' (Hartill, 2014, 2011), the argument from potential harm versus potential benefit should also not be overstated; whatever wider benefits may accrue from research of this kind may well be immaterial for the individual who is damaged as a result of the research experience (Brackenridge, 1999).

Therefore, the study makes provision in relation to their specific vulnerability, principally in the form of information relating to specialist resources/agencies that exist to support men and women who have been affected by sexual violence. The principle of non-maleficence is especially important in work with vulnerable populations and must be considered throughout the research design and implementation, including in relation to the choice of data collection method.

## Recruitment: Identification of Research Participants & Informed Consent

Participants ('those affected by sexual violence') were accessed through the partners' network established in each national context. A central VOICE website was established early in the project with all relevant details explaining the project and the research study, including key information about the interview study.

The website includes translated sub-pages for each partner country and also video messages (in English) from Gloria Viseras and Karen Leach in order to encourage participation. The partners in each country disseminated the information and web links through their networks, via a range of media, including social media, television, radio and newspaper journalism. The sport sector and victim-support partners in each setting were central to this recruitment process. In Belgium and Slovenia specific VOICE-videos were produced including current famous athletes advocating the project.

In sum, the recruitment strategy consisted of four key dimensions:

1. General promotion of the project through the partners' network (e.g. websites of partner organisations, social media, newsletters, events);
2. General promotion of the project through the project website and social media (Twitter, Facebook); see the call for participants on the VOICE-website:  
<http://voicesfortruthanddignity.eu/information/>
3. General promotion of the project through high-profile advocates of prevention on sexual violence in sport;
4. Individual invitations to participate to persons who have already (publicly or privately) disclosed their victimization.

Participants were *self-identifying* adult (18yrs+) and victims/'survivors' of sexual harassment,

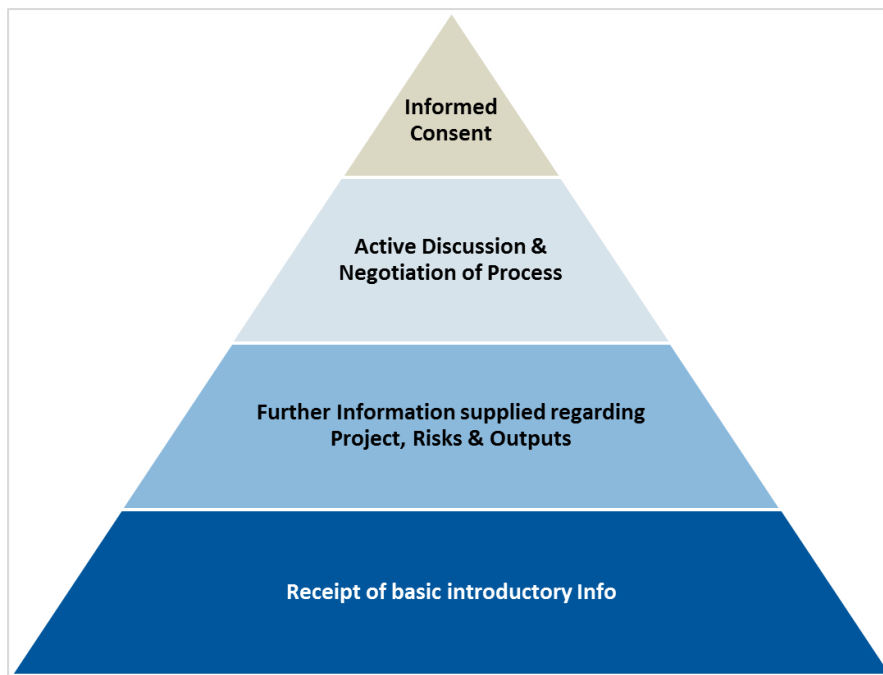
exploitation/abuse in a sport or physical education setting.<sup>2</sup> Their participation was based on a process of informed consent designed to lead to a thorough understanding of the research project. A one-off consent agreement was not appropriate for this type of research and any participant had to move through a process of arriving at consent, where they became increasingly active in negotiating the research process prior to signature. Figure 3 illustrates the process of establishing participant consent.

Basic information on the project was promoted and distributed through the above means with full contact details provided for those who wished to have more information. Potential participants were then able to request a contact of their choosing; this was either by email, telephone, video conference (e.g. Skype) or a face-to-face meeting. Following this contact, if the individual wished to proceed, a preliminary meeting was arranged. This could be in-person but also virtual or telephone, but would allow for open and frank discussion about the project and the potential implications of participating. Further contact could be required according to the participants' wishes. This led to either a withdrawal from the process or signed consent.

At all stages, information for victim-support agencies was made explicitly available and close contact was maintained between the researcher and the designated support agency throughout the recruitment and interview phase. The challenges of recruitment varied according to the national context in partner countries. In some countries (e.g. Germany, UK, Belgium, Denmark) the topic had been addressed by the media, politics and sport sector in recent years, therefore, the call for participation could be included in the ongoing societal discourse. However, some partner countries faced more significant recruitment challenges since the topic was still largely considered 'taboo' (e.g. Slovenia, Austria, Spain).

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<sup>2</sup> In very few exceptions a close standing person (e.g. parent) was interviewed – in case the victim was not able/ not old enough to hold the interview.



**Figure 3: The process of informed consent**

### **Interview Method and Data Collection**

The collection of reports from survivors was based on a narrative, life-history approach. According to Holloway and Freshwater (2007: 709) vulnerable people are sometimes at risk of being exploited in questionnaires or semi-structured interviews because their voices are not predominant, their thoughts are disrupted, as are their identities. The narrative method carries with it the potential to empower individuals to see beyond the boundaries of their vulnerability and – to some extent, regain their self by enabling them to take control.

This closely resembles the approach taken here. A key feature of the research methodology was to allow, or enable, the participants to tell their stories, in their own words using their own language, rather than to demand they answer the researcher’s questions (inevitably generated from his/her categories and (mis)conceptions of their experiences) (e.g. Rulofs, 2016; Hartill, 2014; Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Etherington, 1995).

The interview was based on a narrative interview guideline, so that major parts of the interview were carried out in the sense of a narrative by the interviewee which was not inter-

rupted, followed by questions of the interviewer concerning topics that had not been mentioned by the interviewee in the first recount of his/her story (Helfferich, 2016).

The interviewees were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, the protection of identity as well as voluntariness. In particular, it was pointed out that the interview could be rejected, cancelled or interrupted at any time without negative consequences. Both sides – the interviewee and the researcher – signed the corresponding declaration of consent (see attached). This mutual reassurance is important because interviews on the subject of violence are characterised by uncertainty among both parties (Helfferich, 2016: 126): In general, interviewees have little control over the situation, because they do not know what they will be asked, whether they are embarrassing them, and how what is said is arranged by the other person. In contrast, the interviewer has control over the questions, but not over the answers. The interviewer does not know which experiences of violence are revealed in detail, how intensively she/he gets involved and how stable the person to be interviewed reacts to the questions. For the design of interview situations with persons affected by violence, this

means enabling as much confidentiality and mutual reassurance as possible. The interviewer leaves the narrator enough scope for the narrative to unfold. The interviewee decides how much and how detailed he/ she reports.

### **Interviewing and Transcription**

Interviews lasted between 00:25 to 7:00 hours with a mean of 2:04 hours and were based on a protocol (see attached) developed with the help of victim support organisations and survivors. The aim (and challenge) for the research team was to strike a balance between collecting the necessary scientific data while protecting the rights and interests of the interviewee, avoiding re-traumatization and attempting to foster a process of empowerment. There was no requirement for the interview to be 'one-on-one' and some interviewees invited a trusted other to sit-in during the interview (e.g. professional counsellor, close friend or police officer). Contact numbers to helplines or victim support organisations were at hand and the interviewers were prepared to accompany the person to such counsellors if necessary.

A post interview communication was arranged in order to check for the interviewee's emotional state and whether further meetings or support would be necessary. Beyond these standard arrangements, *VOICE Acknowledgement Forums* were arranged by the project team in each partner country in order to provide the opportunity for interviewees to speak directly to a wider audience from the sport sector.

Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, verbatim, as soon after the interview as possible (typically within 2-3 weeks of the interview). The interviewee received an audio-copy of the interview unless they requested otherwise. The audio and the transcription were stored securely according to data protection guidelines and research good practice. The interviewees were assigned a pseudonym and their identity, as well as any other hints to organisations, places, persons, were anonymized. The interviewee had the right to with-

draw any and all data collected at any point up to eight weeks after the interview.

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity vs. Information that may lead to the prevention of a crime**

As a potentially vulnerable population, studies with 'survivors' typically emphasise the importance for confidentiality and anonymity (e.g. Træen & Sørensen, 2008; Brackenridge, 2001). As mentioned above, all research interviews were conducted in the understanding that the research participants' identity will remain confidential. However, it is important to outline explicitly the ethical dilemmas related to (the limits of) confidentiality and anonymity inherent within this type of study. This especially concerns the situation where information might be disclosed in the interview that may be used to prevent further violence and abuse, especially to protect children and youth. The overall recommendation from the VOICE-Steering Group concerning this issue was that, in such situations, the researcher would encourage the interviewee to make an official report. If s/he preferred not to, the researcher would pass on any relevant information to the authorities, whilst maintaining the anonymity of the interviewee (as far as permissible by law). However, it was important to note that research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege and may be liable to court summons/subpoena. All researchers were advised to clarify this via the informed consent process in accordance with corresponding national legislation and to be prepared to handle such situations with the necessary caution and responsibility.

### **Participants of the study**

72 individuals affected by an experience of sexual violence in sport participated in the VOICE study. Of these, 71% were female and 29% male (see table 2). One quarter of the participants were aged 18 to 29 years, two-quarters were aged 30 to 49 years and one-quarter over 50 years of age. Three interviewees

(6%) indicated a disability. Regarding the sexual orientation of participants, 83% identified as heterosexual, 6% homosexual, 1% bisexual and 10% either did not disclose or offered no information on this.

**Table 2: Participants of the VOICE-interview-study in seven European countries**

Category		Abso- lute number (N=72)	Percent- age
<b>Gender</b>	female	51	71%
	male	21	29%
<b>Age</b>	18-25	11	15%
	26-29	8	11%
	30-39	19	26%
	40-49	18	25%
	50-59	13	18%
	60+	3	4%
<b>Country</b>	Austria	7	10%
	Belgium	18	25%
	Denmark	9	12%
	Germany	20	28%
	Slovenia	2	3%
	Spain	7	10%
	UK	9	12%
<b>Disability</b>	not dis- abled	68	94%
	disabled	3	4%
	no infor- mation	1	1%
<b>Sexual orienta- tion</b>	heterosexu- al	60	83%
	homosexual	4	6%
	bisexual	1	1%
	undisclosed /no infor- mation	7	10%

The distribution of participants varies across the seven countries with Germany (20) and Belgium (18) having the biggest shares and Austria, Denmark, Spain and UK ranging between 7 to 9 interviews per country. Slovenia included 2 interviews into the study; in total 4 interviews were conducted by the Slovenian researcher) but two participants chose not to provide consent to be included in the study. All in all, the recruitment and interview process in

Slovenia faced significant obstacles due to the long-standing taboo around open discussion of sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse.

In three cases, where the affected person did not want to tell his/her story themselves, interviewees were not victims/'survivors' themselves but someone with a close personal relationship with them (e.g. parent). Whilst not originally envisaged, this testimony proved of considerable value in offering a different perspective.

### Methods of interview analysis

Empirical research using qualitative interview methods to analyze sexual violence in sport has so far been characterized by generalized statements across the sample. As a result, the individual voices of those affected are sometimes forced into passivity, and the individual cases and their narrative construction are moved into the background (Fasting & Sand, 2015: 573). Only a few (recent) studies have focused on case studies and the reports of those affected, yet this methodology seems to be useful if a differentiated picture of the course and background of sexual violence is to emerge (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Fasting & Sand, 2015; Hartill, 2014; Owton & Sparkes, 2017; Rulofs, 2016). This methodology, focused on the narrative of the individual victim, is also a relevant step with regard to the acknowledgement of sexual violence because it prioritises the significance of the voice of the (often) previously silenced individual (Helfferich, 2016).

Following this approach, the analysis within the VOICE-project was threefold. First, each interview was taken as a basis from which to reconstruct the individual story of the survivor, written in an encompassing first-person-narrative. The second step was to thematically analyze the interviews based on a "thematic narrative analysis" (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). A third step of the analysis was to gather systematic quantitative data across the 72



interviews. All seven researchers described each interview with the help of a systematic excel-matrix and sent the data to the project lead. The seven files were merged into an overall SPSS-file. Thus, it was also possible to analyze the 72 interviews on a quantitative basis.

It has been our priority, throughout VOICE, to ensure that the research did not overshadow the individual accounts provided by our participants. We resist traditional (academic/scientific) approaches that reduce such testimony to themes and categories, in the name of 'science' and 'objectivity'. Such an approach can feel alienating to those who have invested so much into the research process. Therefore, approximately one-third of this report is spent presenting 12 selected narratives of harassment and abuse in sport in order to illustrate the many insights provided by the individual stories of survivors. We regret that this only represents a portion of the total, but the VOICE interviews provide a deep well of evidence from which we are committed to collectively draw upon in our continuing efforts to raise standards for children and young people's welfare in sport.

Following these narratives we present a thematic and quantitative analysis of the project data.

Readers of the following pages should be aware that the narratives of sexual violence can arouse strong emotions. Please read the stories in an environment you feel is safe and supportive. If necessary, talk with others about the stories and seek professional support where appropriate. The VOICE website ([www.voicesfortruthanddignity.eu](http://www.voicesfortruthanddignity.eu)) also includes contact numbers to helplines in the partner countries.

## 3. Narratives of sexual violence in sport

### 3.1 Peter

My story began when I was 3 to 4 years old. I grew up in an affluent middle class family. We were never short of anything material. I was the youngest of three children. Back then I already felt tension in my family, between my mother and father, which made me feel insecure. Insecurity grew. My parents were regularly fighting in front of us. It was never violent, but my father had a fiery temper. He was yelling and overturned furniture and books, before he left the house in anger. Even though it wasn't every day, I had a pain in my stomach, because I had no explanation for what was happening or why. My mother was very introverted, sad and worried. I had no one to talk to and no place to go. Even though we also had good times with family and holidays, it didn't change and I was nervous and frightened.

I brought this insecurity with me, also into the first years of school. To my good fortune, I grew into a friendship and sport was the predominant common interest. Football, especially, became my refuge. I was good at it, and it gave me status and identity. Sport became my rescue, and in fourth or fifth grade I was number three in the hierarchy. We established a boy-gang which we named "the Bloodsucker-gang". I was taking advantage of the ease and comfort that the group gave me. I remember that I was seeking to avoid confrontations and being put to the test among the others. I was simply afraid to fight and lose status.

I started playing football in the local club when I was seven. I loved football with my big brother and my friends. We played as much as possible. During the first years in the football club I felt insecure. I was coached by young boys, who didn't notice my insecurity and weren't able to handle the dynamics between the boys.

Then at one point we got a new coach, who changed that situation. Our new coach was about 35-40 years old and a different type. The coaching was organised and he was always prepared. He had plenty of drills for us. It felt like a game and we had fun during practice. He took care of us in a completely different way than the young coaches we had before. He was a calm person, who talked with us and showed personal interest in us. He asked how we felt, and he had a good contact with our parents. If you told him something personal, he would remember it and follow up later. He was that person, you could confide in and he gave me the attention that I didn't get at home.

When I was playing football, he made sure that no one yelled or scolded. If any conflict arose, he took care of them in a decent way. He was a role model for us. He treated everyone with respect. He had a special thing he did. If I had hurt myself or became nervous, he would place his hand on my chest and talk with his calm voice. Contact like this was his way to communicate with us, and it felt good for me. Furthermore, he also worked at my school as a dentist. At work he was the same calm man – always nice to me. He arranged small get-togethers in his house, where he lived with his wife and son. The boys and I had a nice time. It came naturally to us, because his son was a part of the team too. We also started having physical tests on an exercise bike in his basement. Everybody had a fixed time to meet for the test.

I had a very good time until *that* day. That day I was suddenly alone with him in the changing room. The hand on the shoulder and the calm talk became the access point to a physical sexual violation. The talk fell silent, and I was paralyzed by fright and I didn't know what to do. The feelings inside me changed in a second from wellbeing to desperation and a need to escape from the changing room. But I couldn't say anything, I didn't dare and I froze. That man had been giving me so much calmness and happiness. He was the only one that I really

trusted. Everybody liked him – in the club, the parents and all the boys.

In the time hereafter, it was all very chaotic because of so many ambivalent feelings. On one hand, I didn't want to let go of that person, who meant so much to me. But at the same time, I was so afraid to be alone with him again. I was ashamed of what had happened, and I was sure that I didn't want to tell anyone. The person who had my confidence, who I was entrusted with, had become my sex offender. I felt trapped in those feelings of fear and dependence. I didn't understand what was happening.

I don't remember how many times he abused me. I really couldn't say if it was five or fifteen times. Furthermore, I don't remember how long it lasted, but I remember my ongoing fight not to be alone with him again. When we were playing football, he was the same person as usual. He was always calm – also when he abused me. The next two years I spent a lot of time on planning how to get home. I needed to be sure that my father picked me up on time, or that I had my bike with me. I didn't succeed every time. I remember how I put off a physical test because I knew that I would end up being alone with him. I made many excuses, but in the end I ran out of excuses and had to make an appointment. The result was as expected.

One day my father came home from work and said that he would like to talk with me. He told me that our coach no longer would be in the club. Two of the other boys had told something about him. I don't remember the exact words my father used, but I knew what it was about. I was shameful and not used to talking about my problems – only with my coach. In my family, difficult feelings were often causing a big quarrel, therefore I knew, that the best thing was to keep it to myself. I kept my story to myself and my parents didn't ask any questions. Today I know that they didn't believe what the other boys said. That tells something about how skillful my coach was at manipulating everyone.

I never saw him again. He left the club, and nothing more happened with the issue. How many boys he managed to abuse is unknown. Afterwards he was never mentioned in the club, and the boys and I never talked about him and what had happened. Anyway, I wouldn't have said anything. My secret disappeared with him, and now there was no risk that people would know. That was a relief for me.

It sounds weird, but I was left with a kind of grief. I projected guilt and shame on myself. I was sad that I lost my confidante – the person who took care of me, when life became hard. With my coach leaving the club, I closed a chapter of my life, and the feelings connected to it – I thought. Until that day, when I turned 40, and by a coincidence saw a documentary on TV (Sig det ikke til nogen, 2004). It was about men who talked about the consequences of sexual abuse in their childhood and the effects it had had on their life. In one way, it was frightening to see oneself delineated, but at the same time a relief. I was no longer alone, and someone told me that the feeling I had wasn't wrong – that *I* wasn't wrong. There was an explanation for why I felt different. Why I acted and reacted, like I did. All of it was connected to the years of my life, when I was sexually assaulted. It was a big relief, but also the point when all the hard work began. Over many years I had to fight anxiety. I'm scared of men and scared of being alone with one person – especially when there is silence. Furthermore, I have problems with my masculinity. Finally, I got help, and now I'm able to share my story. I hope, that my story can help the clubs to have a more open dialogue about this issue.

### 3.2 Lisa I

I had a lovely childhood, especially because of the close relationship with my siblings. We used to do martial arts together. When I was 14 years old, my parents separated. It was a hard time for me. It changed how I saw myself, and what I did. I took a lot of responsibility at home – maybe too much sometimes.

I started doing martial arts with my brother when I was 12 years old. I really liked it, and I had two of my good friends there too. The club was small, only two-three persons in the board, and one of them was the head coach. He was also the president of the sport federation. In the beginning, we trained twice a week.

Our coach was very tough and autocratic. You could feel it in the way he walked around. He had done martial arts since he was young, and his black belt was pretty worn – he had had it for a long time. There was something very authoritarian about him, especially in the way he talked to us. I remember that he said my name wrong the first two or three years – I didn't dare correct him. We were disciplined physically. It was the hard way to learn but I learned pretty fast. When the lesson was over, he smiled anyway – especially to the parents. I think all the parents liked him.

Over the years the club got new members. Later on some of us were allowed to do the warm-up and often it was me. I was 16. I got a lot of praise and was often accentuated as the good example, which made me proud. I got a particular role on the team. Maybe because I was responsible and always did the right things and paid attention.

My mother liked to watch us practice. Then she was relaxed and had time off from housework. She was very charmed by our coach. He knew that she was alone with us and offered to drive us home when he had finished coaching. Slowly he became a close friend of the family. At the same time we had a higher grade and we were encouraged to do more exercises than others, including Saturdays. We started having more time with him and slowly a friendship was built.

He offered to pick me up when we had parties at school. Once he wrote to me, saying that I should always call or write to him if I couldn't get home. Then he would pick me up, because a father would do that. He would take us to the cinema, dinner at his place, or he would drive

us for competitions. Once I got very ill and couldn't go to school for several months. He offered my mother, that I could have a kind of "respite care" – as he called it – at his place. My mother was happy about it because it gave her some time off. Sometimes I stayed for the weekend.

He had a big house. I felt safe, and there was a warm atmosphere. At the same time I felt, that I had to walk and stand correctly. Usually he was happy, made delicious food, we watched movies, talked and had a good time. The house also had enough space so I could have my own room.

When I was 17 years old, I had no boyfriend or any sexual experience yet. He knew that because we talked about that too. One night I was going to stay all weekend. I had done that two-three times before. When my mother left, we were sitting on his couch. I felt a need to lean up against him, like I would do to my father. It was a hard time for me. He placed his arm around me and then we just sat there.

Later on he started to caress me, stroked my arm and face. I felt uneasy about what happened. It was very intimate and private. I had never been so close to a guy before. Clearly, my boundaries were crossed. While I sat there thinking about what happened and what it meant, he turned my head and kissed me. I had never kissed anyone before. I didn't know what to think. It didn't feel natural, but it wasn't a violent assault – it was gentle and calm. I had my own room to sleep in and when I wanted to go to sleep he said, that he would like to tuck me in. He lay down beside me – he had never done that before. He stroked my cheek until I fell asleep.

For the first time I didn't tell my mother, what had happened. This was one of the reasons, that I started having mixed emotions. I had no one to talk to. My mother had a crush on him once, which was very difficult for me. My inclination to tell what had happened shrank.

The next time I was there, we were going to bed, and I was on my way to the bedroom when he said that I could sleep in his bed. I kind of panicked. I stopped and hesitated for words, after which he offered to sleep on the couch. I didn't dare to say, that he should sleep on the couch, so I agreed to sleep in his bed. It was very weird and I didn't feel comfortable. He took my hand, gave me a hug and a kiss for good night. Next morning he had to go to work. I stayed in bed to hide. Then he came back, smiled and said that it was a nice visit. He kissed me and left.

Unfortunately I felt flattered by his praise. It didn't matter if he praised me in the dojo or elsewhere – it had the same effect. At the same time I didn't feel that the lines were clear anymore. If he asked me to do something I would just do it.

The next time I slept at his place was after a staff party. I had only been drinking a small amount of alcohol. This time he also touched my body. Once again he crossed my lines and I was confused. I could feel, that he was experienced, and that made me passive. I remember that the silence was only interrupted by his encouraging words or compliments about my soft skin and how lovely I was.

Things changed for me when we were doing martial arts. Suddenly I couldn't stay focused. Now I had got to know this other side of him. He acted the same way to me, but I became very body-conscious about touching and distance. He didn't cross my boundaries during practice, but I was alert and just the look of him reminded me of what had happened in his home.

One night I went to him late in the evening. We had tea in the living room, and after some time he started hugging and kissing me. For the first time I kissed him back. The situation developed. Then he asked, if I wanted to go to bed with him. I don't know why I did it. I don't think I was able to do otherwise. It was the first time we had intercourse. I didn't know

where to look or where to touch. I was able to stutter, that I wasn't on the pill, but his answer: "don't worry – I have control over it and I don't have any diseases".

Afterwards I felt it was wrong. It was sad because I couldn't talk with anyone about it. About these feelings he said: "no one had to know – they wouldn't understand". I tried to read a lot of books about love, boyfriends and sex, but none of them told my story.

I continued visiting him. I didn't feel in love, but I was enthralled with him. No one else showed me that kind of attention. About 8-10 times we had intercourse. It wasn't every time I visited him. I just awaited his next move. I learned to read him – if he took my hand or touched my thigh, I knew it was a day where he wanted sex. My inclination to tell what had happened shrank.

Together with my brother and a friend I went into intensive training as we were preparing for the black belt. We spent a lot of time with him, and I was constantly feeling unwell. When we got the belt, we were excited and proud. All of us passed, and he had bought the belts. He also wanted to pay for my graduation. I thought it was a kind of gesture, which meant something to him. All the time I felt, that I had to be thankful for the things he did, and I wasn't allowed to question his intentions.

Our relationship was never defined, and we never talked about it. He never called me girlfriend, but often he told me that he cared for me, and that I was lovely, talented, beautiful and something special. Once he said if I was another age he would want to marry me.

My friend and I were supposed to train for the next black belt level. This time we had to train by ourselves and I didn't see him that much. One day he texted me saying he had a new girlfriend his own age. It made me very sad.

All these things together caused me to quit martial arts. We gave up the next black belt,

and I decided to leave the club. It was a big defeat for me, but it became too awkward to be there. But we continued texting sometimes. One day he wrote that I could visit him, like I used to do. I missed the safety and support he gave me. We had intercourse and he indicated that he didn't care about his girlfriend. It was the last time, and it was very uncomfortable. I regretted it because I could now see that he had been using me. Slowly I realized that the relationship didn't feel right.

About a year later, I started developing mental issues. I went to a psychiatrist. One day I told her about the relationship with my coach. The next step for me was to tell my parents. My father froze and couldn't say a word. I know he blamed himself for not being there for me. My mother was furious and sad, but she understood why – she knew him. We called the police and they confirmed that it was illegal.

When he continued at the board, my parents contacted the federation. They knew about the trial but continued to support him because they thought that I had a teenage crush and wanted revenge for him breaking up with me. Moreover I was almost 18 years old. One of them was angry because of my mother's letter and wrote back that we should stop making a big fuss as I apparently wasn't badly neglected or pregnant.

My coach convinced everybody in the club that he was right and he started telling false stories about us. Then my mother got a letter saying that we were not welcome in the club anymore – neither my siblings nor me.

In connection with the trial my case was written about in regional and national media. On the Internet were some abrasive reactions – particularly from people in the martial arts world. I tried not to read them, but their comments still got to me and hurt me. I was left with a feeling of needing everything to make sense. I had been through so much pain and if I wanted it to make sense I had to help others. Therefore, I chose to speak out.

### 3.3 Lisa II

I was eight years old when I began practicing a ball game in a sport club that was close to my parents' house. The club had a good reputation as former German champion and so joining the club meant practicing at a high level. When I was 13 I was invited to join a special boarding school which cooperated with the club. This school belongs to the German network of so-called "elite sport schools" which are famous for combining school and training in sport. Since my parents' home was not far away, I did not stay overnight, as many of my teammates did. In the evening, I always returned home.

The interplay between school and the sport club was very close, schooling and sporting activities merged. Teachers and coaches cooperated very closely, my training hours were built into the school schedule. I practiced every day, and at the weekends we played matches and tournaments. During holidays, training camps were scheduled. Sport and training dominated my life.

Since my seventh grade at that school, I had physical education with Mrs. X. She was in her late forties and very popular. She was not like a teacher; she talked with us and was well known for her open-mindedness and casual approach to us youngsters.

We talked often and had a good rapport. She sat next to me during lunch and told me about her private life. Soon we were on a first-name basis. This somehow seemed strange because I was the only student to call her by her first name, but I was also flattered by this privilege. We exchanged mobile numbers and she started to send me text messages, asking me where I was and what I was doing and when we would meet?

At the end of physical education classes, she always kept me in the gym talking. I remember that I wanted to join my classmates in the locker room, but Mrs. X always managed to involve me in conversations and I did not dare

leave her. At school she was almost always around me. She picked me up at classes, took me for lunch, talked to me in the school yard. She even started to meet me outside the school.

One morning she picked me up on my way to school, not directly at my parents' house, but close to the bus station. From this day on, she drove me back and forth to school every day. She was always there, walking and talking with me in the school, driving me around in her car. She occupied me and I had rarely time to be with my schoolmates, so they withdrew from me.

When I realized this, I tried to distance myself from Mrs. X. She responded by blaming me for bad performances in front of the class, giving me poor marks for my school work and spreading negative rumours about me. Quite soon she had isolated me and she openly threatened me: "You better not rebel against me. This will have negative consequences for your career in school and sport."

One day she tells me that she is a lesbian and that she is going to finish her relationship with the woman she lives with. She shows her feelings to me, increasingly hugging, touching, caressing and kissing me. She tells me she would like to have a love-relationship with me. She takes me with her into her house and shows me erotic movies about lesbian relationships between teacher and student. I had to sit very close next to her on the couch in her living-room and she tells me that this is not the first time she has had a relationship with a student. She once shared a room with a female student during a school trip and they had sexual intercourse. She tells me how normal such a relationship is and says I am being a prude.

I slowly realize the hopelessness of my situation. My teacher fell in love with me and she is stalking me. She threatens me to keep silent. I am dependent on her for my marks at school, my sport, my surrounding. She is so smart and



subtle in inventing rumours about me that everybody keeps away from me.

After all, Mrs. X breaks up with her partner and moves into a new apartment. She shows me her new flat and explains to me that this is *our* new home – hers and mine. I look around and I see my face in dozens of photographs on the walls. I realise that she is fixated on me. Then she takes me into the bedroom and shoves me onto the bed. I know this is very close to what I have feared for months and I think desperately about getting out of the situation. I am lucky ... the doorbell rings.

Somehow, I managed to avoid sexual intercourse with her – I don't know how. There were so many situations, but before it came to the ultimate step, I always found a way to get out. This went on for years – five to six years – almost my whole time at the elite sport school. Within this time – I received hundreds and hundreds of text messages from her. She called me “darling”, “sweetheart” and many other names in front of my class, she drove me in her car every day, she touched and kissed me over and over again. It started with little almost accidental touches, then there were hugs. And this always happened in front of the others.

In the car her hand was always on my thigh and caressing me. And when she hugged me, she did not let go of me, no matter how I struggled to get out of her arms. And in the schoolyard, when I told her that I did not want to talk to her, she would grab my arms and drag me behind her ... and all these kisses. I tried to avoid her, but I could not, because I knew that she would take what she wanted.

During the first years at this school, I had only one girl friend. From time to time, I told her about Mrs. X and her affection for me. She was the only one I spoke to. I did not tell my family. But somehow Mrs. X managed to threaten my friend. She received bad marks and Mrs. X spread rumours about her. Finally, she left the school and I was alone. I was so ashamed because of my relationship to Mrs. X. I could not

talk to anybody, especially because Mrs. X was a woman. I could not understand why a woman was focused on me. I wondered whether I was a lesbian? I isolated myself from classmates and my family. I had strong headaches; I cried a lot; I had rheumatic disorders; I cut my hair and coloured it from blond to black. My parents thought this was due to my puberty.

Then I had a knee-injury. Although I received physiotherapy and struggled to get back into shape. I never managed to be back on the top of my skills. I made great efforts to return to my usual fitness, but there was always this other thing with Mrs. X. It lay on me like a spell and exhausted my whole body. I switched off my body and mind and resigned because I knew if I would not allow her to do the things she wanted, everything would get worse.

In all that time, nobody at the school contacted me to see if I was okay. People were watching me and I noticed them talking about me behind my back. None of the teachers managed to ask me. They only watched me and in all that time I was thinking: “Please, if only one of you would ask me, I would tell you everything.” This never happened. Everybody saw it – nobody said a thing. Maybe they just thought that Mrs. X had motherly feelings for me. Maybe they did not ask questions, because my perpetrator was a woman. But sometimes, I also had the impression they were ignoring my situation intentionally and it occurred to me that I would be the liar if I told my story, because it would endanger the reputation of the school.

All this escalated when I fell in love with a boy at my school. I did not tell him much about my relationship to Mrs. X., because I wanted to leave her out of this. But of course she noticed my affection for this boy. She did everything to convince me of finishing with him, but this time I would not give in.

One day, my boyfriend was called to have a conversation with Mrs. X and his coach. During this chat, she threatened him and said he will have to leave the school if he would not finish

his relationship with me. He was so upset about this that he told me everything and – this was the ultimate cut for me – I finally knew that I had to stop this. I went to my parents and told them everything. They were so shocked. They reported to the police as well as the school director.

This happened when I was close to my final exams. I am now in my early twenties and until today I could not cope with the injustice of what I had to endure. This is the reason why I take part in this project and tell my story. I want the situation to change. When you are a student at school you cannot handle something like this. There is a huge wall to break through and you just cannot do it as a student.

In the meantime I learned to deal with my experiences. With the help of therapy I am quite stable now. To tell my story is a step in the right direction and there are other things which ground and support me. Heading for my university exam for example is important for me. These are the steps I take now, which enable me to manage my life. Most important for me is that I am now self-determined, because this was taken from me for years. With each decision I can take for myself, I flourish even more. This is what I do now – I take my own decisions and this helps me so much.

### **3.4 Ron**

I was a well-educated boy. My parents were quite old and set great value upon good manners. This was important at the time when I was a child – 35 years ago.

I started playing football at a famous club in my town when I was five years old. My older brother already played at that club and I urgently wanted to follow him. We were mad about soccer. My parents separated when I was 7 or 8 years old. My brother and I lived with my mother, but she had to work all the time. I remember that I was alone at home very often. I loved my father very much, but I only saw

him sometimes at weekends. I loved both of my parents, but there was not much time together with them. I remember that there were two worlds – me alone at home and me practicing football at the club with my teammates.

It turned out that I was quite talented and I practiced a lot. I was always in the first team and we were very successful. We were a strong group, 11 friends, very dedicated to football. I stayed with the club from 5 to 15 years and I was about to become a professional footballer.

I remember my first coach, Mr. R, very well, always smoking a cigar in his training suit. We liked him. He had an office at the club. “Office” is not the right word, it was more like a storage room. In this room, he measured each of us boys on a regular basis, I mean, he measured our bodies completely – every part of the body, including my penis. Of course he had to touch me when doing this, but I did not mind. He took measurements of the length of each body part and wrote this down in a table. Today, I think it was weird, but when I was a child this was usual for me and my teammates. We laughed about it. He was our coach for quite a long time and then another coach came and took over the training.

He was much younger than Mr. R, longish blond hair, more the “Hippie-type”, very smart, very sympathetic. All of us liked him very much. He was studying to become a physical education teacher and he did all kind of professional training stuff with us. After each match, he handed out individual statistics about how many ball contacts you had and how many this and that ... and this impressed us very much. The training units became harder and other players from other clubs joined our team. Some of my friends I had played with my whole childhood, were downgraded to other teams. The climate changed and I sensed the deadly breath of the professional league.

He had been our coach for about half a year, when we went to a training camp. This was in spring – March or April. In this camp, he visit-

ed me in my room at night. He came to my bed when I was asleep and he gave me a 'hand job'. I mean you can abuse someone in various ways. For me this was abuse, because it destroyed everything.

I do not think that the other boys in my room noticed, they were asleep. The next day in the training camp I stayed in bed and was sick. I had to throw up the whole day. The coach came to me and asked me whether I knew why I felt sick. I thought, you know exactly why I have to throw up. I think he asked me, because he wanted to be sure that I do not tell anybody. I do not remember much more about the situation. We had to stay one more night at the training camp and then we went home again.

I did not talk to anybody about it, but I had very bad feelings concerning him. I found him evil, I really hated him. In the following weeks he provoked me by denigrating me, treating me badly, not letting me play in matches and he just said: "Ron, we understand each other ...". He did not have to explain to me, he was threatening me in order to keep me shut up. I did not fear him, I would have loved to beat him up, but I was too well-educated in this old-fashioned style. I did not dare to fight him. I think he chose me on purpose. He had asked me some private questions before it happened, if I had a girl-friend and some other things, and I think he had picked me because he knew that I was a decent boy and would not fight him.

After this camp I went to training for a few more weeks and then after the summer holidays, I just did not go to practice anymore. I decided this on my own, just stayed at home and did not tell anyone that I quit football. I skipped school as well. For weeks I just did not go to school and then one day, my teacher phoned at home and asked my mom if I was suffering from a severe illness, since I had not shown up at school for such a long time.

My mother did not know anything about this. I was expelled from school and had to join an-

other school. The strange thing is that my parents did not ask any questions. I mean I was about to become a professional football player. Football had been my life, but they did not comment on me staying away from the club. I guess they just thought this was due to a pubertal temper.

I have not talked about this for a very long time. 5 years ago, I told everything to my girl-friend and she advised me to reprocess what had happened to me. My girl-friend is a photographer – a genius – and as a genius, she has a good feeling for what is important. She did not let rest and encouraged me to search after the coach.

I did an intensive internet search and interestingly, I did not find his name in the web. I had the impression that he had been deleted from the web. Finally, I found a photograph showing him at the opening ceremony of a school in my childhood town. By means of that photograph, I found out that he was a teacher at that school. My girl-friend and I travelled to my old town and visited the school.

We stood in the school yard and did not know exactly what to do. Then the director of the school came out of the building and asked us what we were doing there. I told him that we were searching for my old coach and gave him the name. The director was very nice and told us the whole story.

Indeed, my coach had been a teacher at this school. Not long ago, a 15-year old boy had told his mother that my coach, his teacher, was abusing him. The mother reported to the police and after this, 50 other boys from the school came forward and reported being abused by him. The lawsuit was still pending at this time. In the meantime, the coach has been convicted.

I have not told my mother yet and I think I want to protect her from this. My father is already dead. I don't know whether my life would have been another life if I had told my parents.

But I think about what this would have meant for the other children, the 50 boys. Would they have been saved from the experience?

I wish that children are supported to speak up nowadays, that their rights are respected and that they are encouraged to speak about their emotions. When I was young, children were not treated as full-fledged humans. What I had to say as a child, was not important and I hope that this has changed today.

### 3.5 Caroline

I don't remember that much about my youngest years. I was born and brought up in London and lived there until I was about 14. My brother and sister are both quite a bit older than me. I was a mistake, which my mother told me when I was pregnant with my first child. Apparently I was a happy little girl, I've always had this stupid habit of smiling all the time, about everything, and it's always got me into trouble.

My mum never really liked small children. I don't remember spending that much time doing things with my parents at all, apart from on holidays. My father worked as an engineer and he was director of a company. My mother didn't work after having us, I don't know what she did with all her time as she didn't really do an awful lot with us.

My parents were members of a lawn tennis club and at some point they signed me up for lessons during the summer holidays. It was the summer before I went to boarding school, so I would've been about 7 or 8. I don't actually remember anything about the lessons at all. I remember the steps into the club. There was a big reception area which had pillars in it, and there was this man there, who was a friend of my parents. I think he was in his fifties and worked in an office on the left when you walked in.

I think it happened before the lessons, because I seem to remember him walking me out to the

lessons afterwards. He used to call me into his office and said I was his favorite and that I was special. He'd get me to sit on his knee in the chair and he'd stick his hand up my shirt and under my skirt. I didn't really understand what he was doing at all. I remember certain sensations. I remember him getting me to touch him. I remember him sitting me up on the sideboard thing and him pressing against me. I remember feeling like he was squashing me. I remember him getting angry with me because he wanted me to play games. If I was good, he'd give me presents. And if I was very good, I got special presents. And it was a secret and I wasn't allowed to say anything.

I remember telling my parents that I didn't like him very much and I didn't want to go. They got angry with me and said that he was a nice man who was very respected and who spoilt me. He'd kiss me as well. I remember the sensation of his tongue, which felt large and uncomfortable and not very nice and I felt like I was suffocating. Beyond that, I don't know exactly how far he went, I think he put his fingers inside me, definitely. I remember hiding behind the pillars and hoping he wouldn't see me when I got there. I don't know if anyone else knew what was going on, maybe it was just ignored in those days. I find it hard to believe that no-one knew what was going on.

I went to an all-girls boarding school when I was 7 or 8. I loved going away from home. From around that age to around the age of 12, I had a recurring dream which I only had in my room at home. The curtains had a crack in the middle and this used to get bigger and bigger and this person would come out of it and call my name. For a long time that person was a monster to me and wanted to kill me. Just recently it's suddenly hit, when I got home, it struck me, that it was him.

My relationship with my parents was never great - there was a certain distance. Sometimes I hear people saying that their mums are wonderful, and I've never felt like that. It's just not

there. Likewise with my father, who was pretty distant really.

When I was about 12 or 13 in the dormitory at night we were talking about whether anyone had kissed a boy. So I said I had and explained it was a man, and they were horrified. So I shut up about it and didn't say a thing to anyone for years and years about it. Never dared tell anyone.

I was always ill. I had colds pretty often, every 3 weeks or so. Was it attention seeking? Probably. I used to get into trouble a lot at this boarding school for things like talking and singing after lights out. I'd get punished by being sent to sit on the landing. I remember going home at weekends but I don't remember an awful lot of love. I got expelled about 3 or 4 weeks before the end of term. I then went to another all-girls school.

I didn't really see my dad very often. He used to come up in the evening when I was in bed. I used to ask him to cuddle me and he would get into bed with me. I think this was probably in early adolescence. I used to ask him to tickle me and I'd pretend to fall asleep. It got a little ambiguous, it went a bit over the line of what is acceptable and what is not. I feel guilty because I got some pleasurable sensations from it that were not right. I have tried to talk to him about it since and he apologized and said he was sorry if I'd felt that it had gone too far.

I stopped eating at one point and ended up in the hospital for a few weeks. I found this great power that one could have over one's mind by not eating. And no-one could make me eat. It went on for a few months probably.

I went to a mixed school to do 'A' Levels' and discovered boys! I went wild! I used to seduce boys and once I'd had sex with them I wasn't interested anymore and got rid of them. Consequently, I didn't do very well in my A' Levels and didn't go to university. I went on an inter-railing holiday with 2 girls and 3 boys from school. We went on a boat from Italy to Greece

and I ended up sleeping by myself on the front of this boat. I woke up cold in the middle of the night. The guy steering the boat asked if I wanted to come in to warm up. He took me to his private shower and I got in. Shortly afterwards he got in behind me. It was a stupid situation to get myself into and he took full advantage of it. I didn't tell any of the others about it because I didn't dare. I was too ashamed. I got myself into a stupid situation and it was typical me.

After that I went to work abroad as a chalet maid in a ski resort. During this time, I met a ski instructor who was quite a bit older than me but took me out to restaurants and bought me wine. My parents were furious! I fell madly in love with him – I thought I did. Eventually I moved in with him and took up a job photographing skiers. Quite early on I realized he had an angry, aggressive side. He hit me. He used to shout, a lot. Anyway, we got married. My parents were furious and told me I was taking a step down on the social ladder. We had a son. Things weren't too bad after that. I was being a mother and loving it. He was still shouting and still being aggressive but it didn't matter because I had this baby and I was looking after it. I went on to have two more sons.

I did go through stages of depression. I wasn't necessarily happy, but looking after small children was my life and I got on with it and brought up my kids. He was completely uninterested in them and none of them are very confident as a result of it.

I had an affair with a man who was a lot older than me. He wasn't particularly nice to me. It went on for quite a long time and during this time I had my daughter. I did worry about whose child she was but concluded that, as she looked pretty similar to my husband's family, she must be his. I was miserable. It wasn't a great time.

During my thirties I was very depressed. I saw a psychiatrist who was the first person I'd gone into detail with about the tennis club. It's a

big thing when you talk about it for the first time as an adult. A huge thing. And then the psychiatrist died. I was lost, completely and utterly lost at that point because I'd opened up my life to this stranger. I didn't know what to do, I was in such a mess. My doctor was treating me for depression and suggested I stay in hospital to try and deal with all this. I was in hospital for about two weeks, while my lovely au pair looked after the children.

I went through a stage of self-harming, cutting my arms. There was something very satisfying in hurting myself. Around Christmas that year I hit rock bottom and realized that the only way out was to leave him – the kids were miserable. Neither he nor his family took that very well. He threatened to kill me and the children. We moved to a small apartment.

The children spent every other weekend with their father during the divorce and afterwards. Around the time my daughter was about 3 ½ she began having nightmares. She wasn't wanting to go and stay with her father. Eventually, I took her to the psychiatrist who concluded that she had been abused by her father. I was still depressed and had been trying to deal with some of my childhood things and then this came – it was just horrible. The police were involved but in the end no charges were brought against my ex-husband as there was no physical evidence to support the case. My daughter is 18 and is fine now. I don't know what she remembers and it's not something we've really talked about.

When I was about 32, I wrote to the chairman of the club explaining my childhood experiences. Following that I visited the tennis club. The chairman was shocked by what I'd said, but didn't want to believe it, 'he was a respected man'! A few years later I found several newspaper articles on him – he had abused others. My heart sank a mile and that cupboard door opened wide and everything flooded out. The next day I contacted the police. To cut a long story short, I was told that nothing could be

done as my abuser had died.

I contacted the Lawn Tennis Association. They are meant to be re-opening an investigation but it's all gone very silent. I would like an apology from the club and recognition of what happened. That man was there for 57 years. During that time how many peoples' lives did he change? I was just one person there for a few months, and it had a dramatic effect on my life. I feel a lot of regret that there wasn't more of a reaction after I had been to see the chairman, all those years ago. And I feel a lot of guilt, I feel it's very much my fault. For years I thought I was the only one that this had happened to and therefore it must have come from me, because I was a 'naughty little girl', always smiling and giving the wrong impression to people, and I was never any good at anything I did after that. I'm not the world's most confident person, but I try to put on a face of someone who is. I guess that's why I smile all the time. I doubt myself an awful lot and I've never felt very good about myself.

### **3.6 Richard**

I struggled at home, growing up. It wasn't the best growing up period for somebody. My dad was pretty physical. To be totally honest, before the abuse I didn't really mind that too much. I was a bit cocky and a little bit mischievous I suppose. Not in a bad way, just a normal child I suppose. My mum was alcoholic. I had two sisters, one older and one younger. I was keen to get out of the house at any opportunity. I always loved playing football. From about 7 or 8 I loved watching the FA cup final. I'd lay in bed and dream of playing football for life.

When I was about 8 or 9, I joined a football club. They were the best team around. I used to love playing football, it was what I wanted to do. And we were particularly good at it, winning leagues and things like that. It was pretty much one guy, a coach, that ran it and it wasn't supervised in any other way, no par-

ents or anything. Because of the home life I had it was great to get out the house on a Friday night. A few of us would go and stay away for the weekend and I thought 'brilliant! Get away from the family, see my mates and have a laugh'. We were given cups of coffee at night, not realizing that they had tablets in them to knock us out. If you don't know anything's happened then you just basically get up and you're the same person. I can't remember if I was more tired or lethargic afterwards, I just enjoyed going away for the weekend.

We used to go for a run with the club on Monday nights and the lads had their legs rubbed down by this guy, the coach, with this liniment stuff. Around 6 of us would go away at the weekend in his van. My parents never questioned this, it was best for them and best for me. He'd zip all the sleeping bags together so that we were all sleeping in the same sleeping bag. One night I felt his hand come round and poke me. I believe now that he was working out whether the tablets we were given were working. He told us that they were to make us relax. He used to give us beer as well. He groomed us, slowly. I saw him as an uncle, someone who really cared about me. Because things weren't that good at home, this guy became my savior in a way.

In the summer we went on holiday with him for 2 weeks. We went in his van. I loved to play the football and I was away from the shit at home. We were all in a big marquee and part of our trip was to go into his van and read comics, watch a bit of telly, which meant staying in there with the guy that ran the team. One evening it was my turn to go in. I woke up in the middle of the night and found myself strapped down, naked. I came round and looked over my shoulder and I saw him naked. I couldn't move. I was about 11 then. I think I passed out. The next morning, I woke up in the marquee so I'd been taken back there in the night or early morning. I woke up and that was it. Everything absolutely changed for me.

The next morning, he was cooking breakfast for everybody and all the other kids were in their sleeping bags, playing and laughing, and I wasn't with it at all. I got breakfast, chucked it all over him and ran out of the marquee. I just wanted to get away from it all. I remember standing on some steps and nothing making sense. Nothing was where it should be. I was just thinking 'what's happened here?' It was totally like I was lost and even if I could've got off that island it wouldn't have made any difference, I would've been sat somewhere else with the same problem. In anybody's life you get a striking moment and that was it – a striking moment. I went from being happy-go-lucky to 'what the fuck? What the fuck do I do with this?' I mean family life wasn't OK but it was live-able.

I knew that what happened was horrendously wrong. I felt emotionally stuck. There was no way I could speak to my dad about it, because of how he was. My mum would have just died on the spot, there was no way she could cope with that. So I became angry. I was still confused. I was still thinking 'that couldn't have happened, it couldn't have happened'. But actually when something like that happens to you, there's no way you can deny it. There's no way you can make it up, or sense it, or feel it, because at that age you're kind of developing and actually everything about me felt black. There was a switch-off like I'd never had before. It was totally 'what the fuck am I gonna do? What am I gonna do?'

When I got home, I tried to work out how I could stay away from people and keep myself together. I think part of your brain just goes into a survival mode. I didn't want to go to the youth club, didn't want to mix with anybody 'cos I was frightened if anyone said 'we know what's happened to you'. I thought people would think I was gay, would I ever get a girlfriend? Everything was firing at me so fast. And so I led a little secret life. I'd play 'test match cricket' and just focus on getting as many runs as possible.

When I was about 13 or 14, I had severe stomach and bowel pains. I used to get on the floor trying to find a position to make it feel better. I'd never put two and two together - that it could've been because of him raping me. I went to see a doctor about it. I think the doctor told my mum what it was but it was kind of swept under the carpet. I don't blame her, she was a good woman - she just wasn't able to cope.

I did play football again. I was probably the quietest person in the changing room. I wouldn't speak to anybody, I used to just sit on the couch. But everything's still in your head. This thing that's there led me to get into trouble with what I call 'red mist moments' - I knocked a couple of players out. But football was my release, and I was lucky enough to be good at it. I could play footy, have a couple of pints, if we'd had a great win I'd feel a bit better about myself. Then I started drinking too much. I'd play football on a weekend, have a few beers and then get feelings of tremendous guilt and shame flooding back - the depressant effect of the alcohol.

The abuse changed me. Literally you become a different person. I couldn't even entertain people being nice to me - 'why are they being nice to me?' I was reluctant to take presents. Even to this day, at Christmas I'm embarrassed if I get a present, it's a weird thing.

After I left school I worked in offices for about 8 years. I was a meek, quiet, costing clerk. I set up a business doing promotional items after that. I didn't like authority, bosses and stuff so it was good to work for myself. I ran that for about 15 years and then totally went off the rails. There was a lot of socialising involved, meeting clients to discuss promotional items. That old voice in my head came back to bug me, 'you're not good enough, you can't be doing this'. I had a weakness with drink that led me to go over the top. So my business collapsed, I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and got a kicking, a bad head injury, so I

was off too long to hold the business together. But it was almost as if there was an element of self-destruct - I went to an area where there was possibly trouble. Before that I'd jumped off a train before it stopped, I was drunk. I hit the platform and had cuts all over my head. I think I still wanted to be alive but it was a bit of attention seeking.

At that time, I was living with a great woman and did so for 8 years. She was my soulmate and understood absolutely everything. I just didn't get it right. I think maybe if I hadn't gone to court and put this guy away I'd probably still be self-destructive. I've had problems with relationships, sex was always a dirty thing. I've been with my current girlfriend for nearly a year and she's absolutely brilliant. We've made love only about 4 times in a year. It's not a natural flow of confidence it's a real thinker all the time for me.

Around the age of 17, I was spotted to play for a club who were in the Premier League. The first year I played I won two prizes and all that stuff was making me feel better. I was chosen to go for a trial with a professional football club but because I'd got totally hammered the night before I was taken off after 20 minutes. I think my football career could have been better, I think I could have made it if I'd trained every day.

It came to light when he was jailed for a year in the 1980s. People were surprised because he was well thought of. My dad saw it in the paper and said 'better not have touched you', 'no, no, no, never touched me'. He said 'hmm, I thought he looked dodgy when he came round with that purple suit on'. Now I look back and think 'well if you thought he was fucking dodgy why didn't you do something about it?' I knew with how my dad was that I would have shamed the family if I told him the truth. Maybe if my dad had been a better dad or if my mum was more interested, things would've been different. My mum was a very weak woman and my dad was a very hard man. He died about 35 years ago, I



was jumping up when my dad died, he was so good outside with people but in the house he was a bastard. I looked after my mum after my dad died. She had a medical condition and died about 15 years ago.

I'd given this man a whack when I'd seen him in the park with children. I thought 'you know what? He aint getting away with this'. He might have ruined part of my life but it wasn't going to happen to them. Aside of my physical attempts to do it, I decided that it had to be done the proper route. So I went to the police. I'm lucky that the police officer helped me through the court case and I realized that it wasn't my fault. He got a long sentence and as he's old now he'll probably spend the rest of his days in prison. I've been to AA for the drinking, I've had counselling for it, and at the time I appeared in the dock, I'd been dry for 12 weeks. People such as the police officer who helped me have led me to think I'm worth something now, so I don't wanna let them down. I probably wouldn't let myself down now, I've put it to bed a little bit now, the shame and the guilt.

### 3.7 Pika

We lived in a large house with a large back yard and plenty of grassed area. As a child I lived with my mother and father as well as my grandmother and grandfather. I did not go to preschool and was looked after by my grandmother. Later I got a little sister Katja and she also did not go to preschool.

I remember an event from my childhood, which I believe had quite a traumatic effect on me. I was standing at the top of the stairs and crying because my mum wanted to leave with my younger sister Katja. I still do not know why she wanted to leave me. I am not even sure if I want to find out. I do not even know how to ask her or whether she would even want to answer. I think that because of this event I like my father considerably more than my mum. We get along much better and he is easier to talk

to. Mum has never been great at female conversations. Every time I asked her something she would answer, "I don't know why you're asking me that," which is not much help for a teenager.

My parents wanted to get a divorce several times, mostly because of my mum's incentive. A few years ago I found out, that she is on psychiatric medications. She also wanted to leave a number of times. Just like at that time when I was little. But until now she has always returned. Precisely because of my mum, the atmosphere is not particularly good. Nothing is ever good enough for her. She wants to control everything and everyone. I sincerely admire my father for being able to put up with her. My grandma says, she has not always been like this but that both births, especially my young sister's, were quite difficult on her. I have close relationships with my dad, mum, sister, my grandma, grandpa, my godmother and cousin.

I think I was in fifth grade of elementary school when I started training gymnastics. I trained for about two years and then started training athletics as one of my classmates did that as well. I believe my athletic career started around 2008. But that was not anything serious; we were just a large group of athletes learning basics. Then a couple of years later, I transferred into the advanced group.

Later on four athletes from this group started to train under coach Jure. We were truly a good group; Matej and I were hurdlers, Lana and Žiga were long distance runners. We had quite a special relationship and I believe that we primarily trained because of good company and plenty of laughter during practice. There was no lack of support for each other during difficult parts of practice, when we would prefer to give up. Lana was the first to leave the group, then Matej because of studying abroad, so only Žiga and I were left.

I was not progressing in hurdling so I decided to try hammer throwing. At first I did it just for fun, just to see how far the hammer would fall.

Then I mastered the technique. I liked it and I could notice and feel the progress. I started attending competitions. These were always a little disappointing as they never went as well as practice. I always attributed the loss of a few metres from practice to stage-fright. However, I was still satisfied. Unfortunately, I was never able to throw a 4 kg hammer to 50 m and I probably never will. I do not compete or train anymore. My last visit to the stadium was on 15th July 2016 because of bad experience. That date I cleaned out my locker.

The offender was my coach. Our relationship was that of a coach and an athlete. The relationship was actually quite unprofessional. I do not think that the coach has the right to know everything about you, your problems at home, in school, with your boyfriend, anything really. Or that he has the right to make inappropriate comments regarding a person's physique – mentioning their behinds, hips, and chest. Looking back I now see that I didn't know him. I only thought that I did. And I regret ever meeting him. He is the master of manipulation and I was naive and weak enough to fall for it.

We did not talk at all at practice as if he was ignoring me. In fact, it seemed as if he was angry with me. Then we had a sports camp. I was quite afraid of how he would act towards me but the relationship suddenly changed. It was just the conversations were normal and everything was alright. The same occurred after the event, as if nothing had ever happened.

I think he "liked" me before already. He was at my first throw club camp in the winter (February) of 2015 and I had not turned 18 yet. I was assigned an extra bed in the room with two other athletes, so I could not sleep comfortably which is why the coach invited me to sleep in his room. I slept in coach's room for the next few days, of course on my own separate bed. However, the final morning I woke up due to an odd feeling. The coach was in fact holding my hand. I panicked and asked him why, what was the point of that? He answered that I can

let go if I want. And in that moment I let go of his hand.

Before returning home that morning, I could not attend the practice because I experienced my first anxiety attack. There was a feeling of chest tightness, difficulty breathing, arm numbing etc. At the time, I did not know what that was and I said I was not able to throw because of back pain.

When I arrived home an email from my coach was waiting for me, in which he wrote that he had held my hand because he cared about me ... but that if I did not want that, our relationship from now on would only be professional and he would like to apologize for that. I never answered. Then everything went on like nothing even happened. The practice went on as usual. Sometimes I could not attend because of school and other obligations which made him ignore me. I remember coming to the stadium after school, meeting the coach as I was going to the throwing area and his only greeting was, "You're here as well?" He left me alone without a work-out plan. This is why I tried calling him twice over the phone but unsuccessfully. I left the stadium in tears. I wrote him an email asking when I can return to the stadium because I don't feel welcome. The answer was that he does not need a picture but an actual person who wants to train.

Then things somehow went back to usual. But there were definitely a few weeks of contempt here and there. I would come to practice and not receive any instructions for workouts or be provided with any comments during the practice itself. It was so obvious that others in the group noticed that something was not right.

In the summer of that year (August 2015), I did not train much at all. First there was a 10-day choir camp in Italy where I met my boyfriend (we sang in the same choir), then a week of family holiday by the sea, a week of rest and finally the senior class trip. I was really surprised how calmly the coach took my absence. Then the new school year began: the senior

year, which meant proving yourself with final results at the end of the year.

One day in September, the coach and I were the only ones at the throwing practice. After the practice, he asked me if I would sleep with him. I was not terribly shocked as I somehow predicted it, but I did not think that he would actually ask me. I felt horrible. I did not know what to say. I had a boyfriend and I was scared of the coach. It took me a fortnight to pluck up the courage and tell him that my decision was 'no'. I did consider giving in and sleeping with him to get it all over with. His response was expected – disregard and contempt.

In time it got better again. I told my boyfriend who was so angry that he wanted to physically confront my coach. However, I did not want him to get involved in any way. Our relationship was almost ruined but we made it through. In December 2015, we went to a winter sports camp in Croatia. Before leaving I was frequently absent from practice because of school obligations and the coach would not talk to me. That is why I was slightly scared of how things would go during the camp. Yet it went surprisingly well. The practice went by normally and the communication was not problematic.

One night during the winter sports camp in Croatia I fell asleep in his room and when I woke up he was lying next to me. He pulled me close to him, caressed my hair, face, stomach, back ... then I pulled away and wanted to leave but he wanted a kiss on the mouth. I turned away, refused to kiss him and left the room.

Then I had the worst anxiety attack in my life. I thought I was going to die. I was sitting in the hallway in front of the hotel room and crying. I could not believe what I got myself into. I had a boyfriend at home who was not particularly thrilled about my decision to go to camp. I was ashamed and at the same time filled with horror. Somehow I managed to get myself in the room and into the bathroom where I refreshed myself and calmed down. Then I decided to go back to him. I only wanted our rela-

tionship to be professional and for the contempt to end. He agreed and added that we should forget about the event and act as if it had never happened.

I did not mention the event to my loved ones. At the time of my anxiety attack, I immediately wrote my friend Eva who tried to calm me down. She believed me as I had previously told her what the coach was like. Then I told my therapist as well. He suggested a lawsuit but that did not even cross my mind. I did not want any personal resentments or revenge. Then after a while, I told my friends, as well as my boyfriend. They were appalled that anything like that could happen. My boyfriend and I almost broke up because he was convinced that I wanted to cheat on him. That was not true, but I do feel guilty for letting it happen to me.

Before New Year (2017), I met with Vida, who used to train with me, for a drink as I wanted to tell her why I actually left the club. She forwarded the information to the club president who we met later on so that I personally told him as well what had happened. The offender was not punished and as far as I know he still works as a coach at the club.

I started seeing a therapist due to my GP's recommendation who had previously referred me to various specialists due to my problems with high blood pressure. After realizing I was most probably having anxiety attacks, she then referred me to a psychotherapist as well. I began seeing him regularly. However, he believed that the source of my problems was most probably my sports training. I did not believe him because I still liked going to practice and I was happy to train. It seemed he was right. In April 2016, I started taking antidepressants because of suicidal thoughts. In the beginning of December 2016, I stopped taking them. I noticed that my condition improved. The anxiety attacks stopped and the suicidal thoughts disappeared. I could say that I now live freely again.

I still feel stupid and thoughtless for letting something like that happen to me. Sometimes I

even blame myself for somehow seducing him and encouraging him to do this. I want to forget him, erase him from my memory and my life. Since 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016, I never returned to the stadium and even if I pass by, I prefer to make a large loop around it, to not accidentally run into my former coach.

### 3.8 Sara

I live in a house with my brother, mother, grandmother and grandfather on my father's side. My father died in a work accident (he was struck by a fallen tree during a tree-felling inspection) when I was three and a half years old. After the accident, my grandparents offered my mother for us to move into their house and live there. We are very close and I cannot think of any severe arguments between family members. I best get along with my grandmother because she is an exceptionally warm and kind person and understands me completely. Since I did not attend preschool, I spent most of my childhood with her and I love her very much. My mum is an accountant and works at a private firm. I have close relationships with my mum, my grandparents, my brother, aunt and my boyfriend.

I have been training triathlon since I was twelve. I did not do any sports before then because I preferred being at home and not hanging out with my peers that much. I quickly started to like triathlon and soon I became faster than my peers. Until around the age of 17, I progressed rather quickly and successfully.

While I was extremely self-critical and unsatisfied with my results at the time, I look at this differently today. I had problems with self-esteem because of which I was not able to show my capabilities at competitions. This saddened me tremendously and I often cried because I was convinced I was incompetent, slow, fat and so on. What made it worse was that during practice I did everything just like others and even more, but at competitions the results were not evident.

I felt great pressure from my coach who made it clear that he was disappointed with me – during practice he encouraged everyone except me, he did not even congratulate me after the competition and in front of me he displayed excitement about other athletes who partied and drank and made them up to be “stars”. This brought me down because all I ever did was train and do anything imaginable to improve. At other times he encouraged me as well, during difficult times; however, he usually turned his back to me.

After turning 17, I stagnated, I gained some weight, I had plenty of work at school and that is when the coach completely turned his back on me. Yet I continued to persist. In time I stopped worrying about results. I trained and tried my best. However, enrolling into medical faculty was a turning point for me and I became a lot more relaxed. I decided to be a doctor and not a professional athlete which is why I enjoyed practice more and was not so much invested in the results anymore. The coach became nicer and stopped pestering me.

I always got along with others in the group, no matter who they were. Of course there were minor, unimportant arguments, especially among girls because of competitiveness and the need to prove ourselves. After everything I stopped doing sports for a while, for about five months. But then I returned again. I still train today and am probably more committed than ever.

The offender was my coach. I thought that I knew him well as we have known each other for about 7 years and had spent a great amount of time together. But he was extremely closed off and never showed his real face. At the beginning we got along well. He saw potential in me; he encouraged me, praised me and always stuck up for me. When I stopped performing well, he turned his back to me and stopped caring about me. He did this to everyone, for whom he realized was not a “world-class athlete”. I cared about other athletes more than

him and I made good friends and always had a wonderful time. When I stopped worrying about results and stopped proving myself to him, he began to show affection. All of a sudden he became very friendly and flattering, even in front of other athletes.

It was on a summer day in 2013, at the end of June, right after the end of finals when I drove home from a running practice. I was 17 years old. He called me and invited me to his place for a drink. As we have been friends for about 7 years, regularly hung out at sports camp, competitions and practice, and older athletes even partied with him, I did not find this unusual.

I went to his place, still dressed in my running tights and a t-shirt. We sat on his couch and talked. He was exceptionally friendly and caring. He said I should lie down on the couch and make myself comfortable. I refused, saying I was sweaty and did not want to lie on the couch as such. But he said I should relax and not worry. So I lay on the couch with my head away from him. After a while he said he would massage me. I refused again because I did not feel comfortable but he persisted that I should not worry and come to him.

He massaged my back and took my shirt off. He wanted to massage my legs but I did not want to take my tights off which is why I said I had a back ache and would like him to massage my back. He agreed. After some time, he said, "Come on, let me massage your legs," but in a very friendly, flattering tone. I agreed. I took my tights off and lay on the couch only in my underwear. After a while he started feeling up my buttocks and asked if that felt uncomfortable. I said that it did not; as the masseurs always massage the gluteus medius as this is an especially tightened and achy muscle in runners.

In a while he said we should go to the bedroom as there is not enough room on the couch. There he undressed to his underwear, smiling and saying he was hot. He said that the feeling of "skin-on-skin" was the best in the world. He

wanted to show me that and lay on top of me. I moved away. He began kissing me and pulling me towards him but I refused and apologized that I cannot. He said: "Thank god one of us has their wits". I felt like he was angry with me. He tried the same a couple more times but I always refused. He did not yell at me, but was quite friendly.

That night he went to some sports game and I went to the coast with my friends. When I left, he sent me a text message: "Tired but with :)". I was completely beside myself. Years earlier I could not explain his constant change of behaviour towards me but then I *foolishly* thought that he likes me and wants me to be his girlfriend. At first I could not understand this and I coolly answered his text messages as I did not know quite what to do. He seemed too old to be my boyfriend and I was thinking how I would tell my mother that I have a boyfriend who was 12 years older than me. Somehow it did not seem right.

We kept sending each other text messages the coming week and when he noticed my messages were quite cold, his became the same. When he returned, he called me to his place. I am not going to lie, I could not wait for him to call me so that we could at least talk and clear things up, as I had no idea what to do. This is when we had intercourse. He did not force me or beat me or anything like that. However, he did say that we cannot tell anyone that we are together. This was not because of the coach – athlete relationship but because of the age difference.

He said we would be a couple but that nobody could find out as this would create a terrible black wall between us and make us forget all the good moments. He said that we would be together until we found other partners we could "officially" be with. This dragged on for 10 months. He called me when he did not find anyone else or when he was bored. The entire time I suspected that he was seeing other girls but he denied it time and again and said that we would be together when I finished my jun-

ior year of medical school. He said that we would tell everyone that we are together.

If I did not want to go to his place, he would get back at me at practice the next day by praising everyone around me and not even looking at me. He would not acknowledge my efforts and openly devalue all my efforts and achievements. This is why I did not want to make him angry and mostly answered when he called me.

At the beginning I was confused, then later madly in love and I began to think about our future together. I cared for him very much, because he ensured that even as a 12-year-old girl I knew he would take care of me. One time an athlete said to tell my father to fix my bike. My eyes teared up and the coach noticed and told him, he would take care of it. I really cared for him and when he showed me "how he cared for me", it made me happy. He knew well, what he was doing because when it was all over, his former athlete friend told me that he said I saw a father figure in him, so he would take on that role. That broke me because he obviously intentionally took advantage of my vulnerability.

When everything saw the light of day and I discovered he was doing the same with other athletes, I was convinced I would die. At that time, I was 20 years old. I did not eat, I felt sick and I lost five kilograms in four days. My family noticed immediately.

My mum was crying and said she knew what was going on. Everyone tried to calm me down but nothing helped. Mum kept telling me every day to not commit suicide. For a few months I did not sleep, I still felt sick, my heart was beating strongly and I wanted to end it all.

The worst of all was that he did not regret his actions but even claimed that he did not do anything wrong and that I wanted it all. That was the worst. He knows *exactly* what he did and he is definitely guilty. He also knew how much harm and damage he did to me by

spreading such lies, but he did not care. I thought about killing myself and by this maybe making him realize the intensity of his actions but I later changed my mind because I do not have enough courage for a suicide anyway. Also, this would not change him either as he does not care about other people's lives.

I had a lot of problems at the faculty because I was not able to focus. My classmates laughed behind my back because I was always confused and extremely sad but I am not going to share my story with them. It was really very, very difficult.

I told everyone, my parents, coaches and athletes, because I could not let this happen to other girls that would come after me. I was extremely angry at other girls who had this happen to them and never said anything. A few coaches defended me, as did my friends and family. The great majority, however, ridiculed me and labelled me as a slut, bitch, liar, and an idiot. It made me sick hearing these words from parents of younger girls who would *definitely* have this happen to them if I had kept quiet. They tried to punish the offender but did not succeed. In the end, he even filed a lawsuit against the committee and I believe received damages.

I spoke with a psychologist who assured me that I was not to blame and calmed my conscience. I have only seen her once. I did not even want to talk to anyone and tried to think things through by myself. Even though my friends were very kind and extremely supportive, I think this is something you need to think through on your own. You do listen to others but you need to start to trust that you yourself are doing the right thing. It is not something others could convince you of.

In the future, we must protect athletes against abuse. So somebody has to immediately write precise rules what is allowed and what not. Young athletes should be educated as well and made understood that not every coach acts for their well-being but perhaps just his own. They

should learn about examples such as my own, even if that seems funny or stupid to them. If this helps even just one girl, the goal is achieved. Even if the girls do not take this seriously, they would at least be made aware of this and could more easily identify warning signs.

Managers of various clubs can do a lot by looking into the lives of their employees and immediately get rid of paedophiles and perverts. However, there is another problem here – just like in my case – when the club president is also the coach.

When I speak of this, it still makes me sick and I find it hard to believe that all of this even happened. However, I have learned *enormously* from this experience. Parents do not care if their daughters get raped by their coaches, only success and results are important. This is what is most disturbing.

### 3.9 Marcel

I am tall now. I was tall back then, when I was a kid. I tried athletics and football. My father had been a football coach, he wanted me to play football but I was so clumsy. I am tall now. I was tall back then.

Most of my father's life was football and actually any sport. He was a representative at our local town hall in sports, so every weekend was all about sports in our house. There was no doubt that my sister and I were going to end up doing sports. Not because of any obligation but because we learnt from an early age that was the right thing to do.

Unfortunately for my father I started basketball in the school and I loved it. Soon enough I realized – everybody realized – it was my sport. I was probably 9-10 years old when I played basketball for the first time in school as an extra-curricular activity. By 12 I was as tall as I am now and all my classmates reached me under the shoulder. It was truly amazing seeing life from above.

They came to the school and selected me. This club was playing in the premiership by then and was one of the top three basketball clubs. This club was another dimension completely. When I played with my classmates, we were always the same group of mates, at the school, at the playgrounds, riding bikes, at the basketball courts; we were always the same ones. This club only wanted me.

Twenty-five years ago there weren't many basketball clubs in our area, definitely not in my town or the surrounding towns. This club was in the nearest city to my hometown, not too far but far enough to depend on cars to go to training and come back home. We were all from different surrounding towns; two of them were even from Barcelona, so I did not know anyone there when I joined and neither did they. Eight new players started that season.

So, I did a tremendous jump from playing with my schoolmates in matches that were neither here nor there, to a premiership club. I became "a chosen one." We were 12 chosen ones and there were thousands out there dying to be in our skin. I didn't feel the pressure right away, but like drizzle, the sport's responsibilities and the meaning of being part of something so big completely soaked me. Every season fighting to win the Catalan and Spanish championships, fighting for being one of the chosen ones to represent Catalonia and Spain. Every season 2-3 players were kicked out, 2-3 players came to replace them. For years I saw them coming and going. The pressure to do well and achieve titles was everywhere.

When I first joined the team I had a comfortable and relatively friendly introduction. I was tall, I didn't play too badly and gradually I became the bedrock of the team. On top of that I was an easy player to deal with – quite introverted – I did not speak much in public and I always avoided trouble. I guess all that made me a "perfect" player for his team.

I started playing high-level games after the Christmas holidays. I was going to be 12 in a

month. I went for 2-3 trial sessions, they talked to my parents and that was it – I was in! The club was very strict about training 4 times a week and matches every weekend. The role of parents in the club was non-existent except that on some weekends they needed our parents' cars to take us to matches. Parents were not allowed to come to training sessions and of course not allowed to talk to the coach. Everybody knew that inquisitive parents would mean being kicked off the team straightaway. Remember there were thousands of kids wanting to be in our place, we were the 12 chosen ones. Parents knew that too. Parents and players disciplined to achieve the same goal. No comments, no complaints, no questions, more chances to stay in.

I still recall those afternoons that we had a match during the week and I had to go to class wearing the club's tracksuit. No other pleasure was compared to this. My head had blown to enormous proportions.

Jogging through the mountains is now my hobby whilst I train for marathons. One morning not only did I go for a jog but my memory was jogged as well. I was 38. I was listening to the radio and a man was telling his story of having been sexually abused as a child in a basketball team. I cannot tell you the emotion that overcame me. My legs began to tremble, palpitations and sweating. I had to sit down. My mind, which had clearly blocked out everything from years ago, was suddenly whispering, "... that child could have been you..." I got up from the rock, I started to slowly walk home with flash backs of disorganised scenes making their way into my mind and making me relive them again. Getting home, I suddenly realized that I had been sexually abused as a child.

Back to when I was 12 again... that same Easter things started to get weird. My team was the only team in the whole club, which was going to a special training camp with our coach. Back then it sounded normal, after all, Joost was an exceptional coach, he was young and he al-

ready had a few titles in his back pocket. He was well-known in the club for taking extra care of his players, "my kids," as he usually called us in front of other adults.

Joost was very competitive and winning for him, as for the club, and ultimately as for all of us was *everything*. Joost was well aligned with the club's, parents', and ultimately players' goals and dreaming of winning everything: the Catalan and the Spanish championships, sending as many players as possible to the Catalan and Spanish national teams.

We were training machines under Joost's command. He insulted us, he treated us with contempt, he pushed us to our physical limits on the court, and then, he showered with us now and then after training sessions – I was 12 and I have never showered with my father but we had to shower with him. Nevertheless, nothing mattered when you're winning. No comments, no questions, no complaints, not even from other club coaches. With time we all normalized it. After all – this was Joost!

We went to a camp site by the Pyrenees for almost a week: 12 players, 12 years old, Joost, who by then was around 25-26 years old and I guess there was a second male coach, a bit older than us and a bit younger than Joost. I don't recall very well who he was because he kept changing over seasons.

I don't remember how it started; I just have flashes of those days. My first memory is this moment on a stage where some of us were late and he forced us to pull down our pants and underpants in front of the rest of the team. I remember one of us crying quite desperately because he was making fun of his underdeveloped sexual bits. You see I didn't have that problem I was quite developed by then.

I also remember that once – this time we were 13 – we went out with some girls that were sharing the house we were in. When we came back he was fuming and demanded that we run up to the summit of the mountain and come



back. That would have meant at least 2 hours of non-stop running. Then, suddenly he bargained with us to exchange that punishment for going to his room and letting him take photos of our genitals. We thought about it for a while and then we agreed that the second option was probably the better one, after all he had showered with us and had seen our willies a million times. After he took a picture of all our willies, one by one and humiliated the ones he could easily humiliate, he opened the camera and burst out laughing. There had not been any film in the camera. He was like that. This was Joost. We were the only ones who knew Joost out of the club environment.

Something that happened often and became quite the norm was that he would come to our room, leave a bag full of porno magazines and say "I leave the bag here, you wank and I'll pick it up in a while," and all that without the need to consume alcohol or smoke. Can you believe that not one out of the 12 ever said anything about these 'side activities' to our families or other players, coaches, adults at the club?

Looking back now it is hard to believe how he managed to silence all of us. In fact, we were more than 12 because every season 2-3 players changed and we used to do 2-3 training camps per season. Yet to my knowledge nobody ever said anything about these sexual activities and humiliations. It is true though that he tamed us very well and the repeated mantra of Joost was "whatever happens in the locker room stays in the locker room." We used to repeat it as well.

On top of that I can see that he made little monsters out of all of us. When a new kid came for a trial session we were quite brutal with him in the locker room - humiliating comments, nicknames, you know all the macho male stuff at once from all of us. There were some new kids that couldn't bear it and just came for one training session and never came back again. We were like a sect and he was our leader. You see

how smart the whole thing was? He didn't need to do all the selection process. We did it for him.

Then, another process was on-going: he selected the players he knew would never talk. Thinking about it now, he used to take the players that were physically more developed home by car. That was two more and me. The other two haven't spoken out yet. I was the quiet, introverted, silenced one; another was having problems at home, the father had just abandoned them; and the third one wasn't a very good player yet he stayed on the team all those years - I wonder why?

One day he suddenly stopped the car, while going back home, and said, "let's masturbate" and that was it. I never said anything about it until this year. He had sexually assaulted me between 75-150 times during 3-4 years, he even looked for me at home when it was holidays and my parents were not there. My father treated him so well. He found him a job in the sport department of the town hall; he came to all our parties and celebrations. I saw more of him around home than some of my uncles. Imagine, even in 1992 for the Barcelona Olympic Games, my father got us tickets to go to an athletic event together to have fun. We even went to his wedding as a family. It was all so screwed up.

Suddenly, I changed clubs. I was physically stronger and I was able to tell him "leave me alone, no more". That was the end. But he was still a part of my family until this year. It's been the hardest time of life, confronting the past, telling my wife, my parents, my friends. Now I'm okay, I'm much better. I went for psychological treatment for a long while, it really helps to understand that it was not my fault, that it had nothing, absolutely nothing to do with me. I just crossed his path, so damn unlucky!

For weeks my father went around with a baseball bat in his car, in case he saw him. I believe he truly wanted to kill him. I had to work

on him and keep reminding him of the existence of his grandchildren, I expected he wanted to see growing up. They haven't met again.

### 3.10 Noemi

My mother felt that gymnastics kidnapped her daughter: so many hours and days away training and competing. I started intensive training at the age of 12 until a serious injury at the age of 16. By intense I mean 8 hours a day with only one week of holidays in the whole year. My mother was definitely not ready to lose her daughter this way. She fought with me several times over this. I always did what I wanted, training and training more.

While my mother always expressed her feelings – too much and too loud, my father never expressed his feelings. He was closed-up, emotionally speaking. I grew up in this family environment. I also have a brother, but we didn't spend much time together when we were kids, now we do. Gymnastics was my thing. I died for gymnastics. I'm a perfectionist and gymnastics allowed me to be what I was without looking too obsessed. In gymnastics, one has to be obsessively obsessed otherwise you won't make it. My family never pressured me about succeeding in my gymnastics; to be honest I didn't need it at all. I wanted to win by myself, I wanted to be excellent. I wanted to be the best of the best. I was already very demanding on myself, so I was ready to be the best of listeners, work hard and shut up and this is what I did for quite a long time, in and out of the gym.

Gymnastics, whilst being a very feminine sport, is one, which is very risky and dangerous. Trying a new movement, a new position in the air demands a lot of guts. You need to feel secure, you need to feel that the one who is going to hold you on landing is strong and knowledgeable, otherwise forget it. This is why I only wanted him to take care of me, even though there were other female coaches. We all knew that he was the most reliable after all it is your

body that is at stake. Furthermore, the gymnasts that he supervised closely were always the ones that got to the top of their game earlier. We fought amongst ourselves to be his favorite; there were lots of jealousies and underground fights to get his attention. The gym was a pressure cooker of tension – always putting the others down, always showing off; always pretending to be something you were not.

So, of course I was looking for him all the time in the gym and I wanted him to like me and to find me worthy to spend time with. I desperately wanted to be one of the chosen ones in his group. Now I know there are other ways of teaching and learning. Back then we only knew that one just learns as much as she suffers – the precursor to the famous saying “no pain no gain.” We were told every single day about it. Suffering was our destiny in gymnastics. Punishment and fear were its two best allies. How desperate must one be in order to believe that only through suffering, can one improve and become better? Back then I didn't have a clue that there were other ways of teaching and learning gymnastics.

When I was injured I suddenly realized that I had no-one. Bye-bye. No coaches taking care of me, no friends, not even acquaintances. When you think about it. I was on the top. I was going to be in Seoul 1988 and now nothing. There is nothing from those days that I miss. Right now I only have rage and tortured memories. Don't get me wrong. I loved gymnastics! The pleasure of achieving a double flip has no price. Being admired and congratulated was a very precious moment.

As you can see I'm still struggling with these two worlds of loving and hating the sport. And all this happened more than 30 years ago.

The gym was an enclosed environment. Nobody from outside knew what was going on there. He told us everyday that in order to excel, we couldn't get distracted: we couldn't share with anyone what we were doing; we shouldn't waste our time listening to music; watching

films; or spending time with our families. In order to reach the top only gymnastics could be in our lives.

We were a very hermetic group. He was always insistent, day-in-day-out, telling us that if we told our mums that they would come and talk to him and if that should happen we would no longer be able to train here. This was only referring to the insults, humiliation and hitting during trainings; he never needed to tell me anything about silencing the abuses – that was taken for granted. The level of control within our lives and thoughts outside the gym was tremendously scary. The fear in our bodies was noticeable, but nobody said anything.

I wanted to please him. I wanted him to guide me and teach me, even though the methods, I can see now, were not the most pedagogic ones. We lived in constant fear of being punished, in constant fear of being in the wrong. I hate the constant judgement of those days. It is almost as bad as the abuse. It was the right and the wrong and the thick line between the two which has driven me crazy all these years. The influence those days had on me is incredible. Even though the gymnastics stopped, the threat of being on the wrong side of that line continued on me for years after.

Unlearning the need to be judgmental and the constant wrong and right of all my actions and behaviours has taken me a long time to undo. Until I had my first daughter I was struggling with this concept. I decided that I needed to rethink my strategy if I didn't want to destroy her life as mine was destroyed. So I started Yoga and Mindfulness and explored my possibilities of getting out of that. I can safely say that I'm much better now, but you know I sometimes still feel that the judging of what is right and wrong overcomes me. He was so strict about what is right and wrong that you end up believing him without question. Whereas I was rebellious at home, I was so docile to get his attention in the gym, incredible, isn't it? Sometimes I wondered how could I be so different?

Everybody was bad, anybody who didn't do what he wanted and how he wanted it was bad. If you got injured you were bad, if you were bad, the others didn't talk to you, like you were toxic, you were isolated pretty much all the time. Playing with being in or out of the chosen group, the threat to be expelled was always in the air.

When it is normal you don't talk about it.

I considered that the abuse was a flaw in myself, I felt it like an imperfection. Being a perfectionist you can imagine how this really confused me. I remember during the abuse thinking about how weak he was, and how much he had fallen in my estimation of being this demigod. I used to look at him challengingly after the abuse and he used to get angry with me "don't look at me like this!". But even so, other moments of abuse happened. I'm sure there were 3-4 of us he was sexually abusing. We never talked about it amongst ourselves. We were so terrified of being caught, of doing something wrong and he could punish you, isolate you.

In my case the abuse happened during the massages. Back then we didn't have a professional physiotherapist so coaches had to do the massages to get us ready for the intense training sessions. You can imagine, training 8 hours-a-day, six days-a-week, we really needed those massages. He only gave massages to those who had a higher level. I became one of them in matter of a year.

I was 13-14 when he started to give me massages in the small room we had next to the gym. The massages? What a pleasure. First, it was time that you were not training and second, my calves have a tendency to cramp so with those massages they were so much more relaxed. I enjoyed the massages for a while, until one day, with a hard-on, he touched my arms, my shoulders, my legs. I couldn't believe it and I thought it was a figment of my imagination. Slowly the abuse progressed until he ended up on top of me masturbating while I

was face down. I never looked at him, never turned my head, I just wanted him to finish.

I slowly started to avoid the massages until one day my elbow was injured and that was the beginning of the end. I was 15 and they didn't give a shit about me. He even made me feel guilty about the injury like it was my fault, like I was making it up because I didn't want to train. So, I started training and competing whilst injecting cortisone and I ended up convincing my body that it was not in pain. I managed to disconnect from the pain and continued training for another year-and-a-half until I had another injury in my ankle. One morning I told my dad that I couldn't feel my little toe. I got scared, then my dad took me to another doctor and they told us that I was going to lose the toe. The nerve had been badly affected by the elbow injury. The operation took 4 hours. My mother wanted to denounce him but I stopped her. They had lots of power – I was scared. I did consciously and systematically ignore the limits of my body and my body almost beat me. I was lucky. Now I'm a Yoga instructor and deep down I think I do it because I want to help people to listen to their bodies.

I never thought that anyone would doubt what I was saying about the abuse. It looks incredible that I'm inventing something like this when I'm 40 years old. Why would I need to make this up? I had to tell my husband at the time, and it was not pleasant. I felt dirty, ashamed, and guilty. I felt like I had allowed it to happen.

It is hard for people to understand or believe that the man who we had all idealized was in reality an abuser, a manipulator of children's minds.

## EPILOGUE

Apparently he came to visit me at the hospital when I was still under the effects of the anesthesia and the only thing I said was "I don't

want to see him ever again." And he left the hospital crying. Clearly my unconsciousness talked for me. I don't remember it, my mum told me when I woke up.

### 3.11 Sarah

My name is Sarah. I am 27 years old and I have one younger sister. When I was about 3 years old, my parents got divorced. I always lived with my mom and every two weeks I stayed at my dad's for the weekend. The divorce never really bothered me, however I always have had the feeling that I received less opportunities to do my sport when I was with him. My sister practiced ballet on Saturdays and went to a youth movement every Sunday. My dad always drove her but when I wanted to practice my sport, he didn't allow me. I really didn't like that but I never said something about it.

I am very involved in anything that has something to do with sport. I studied sport in high school and I have a master in physical education. The combination between school and sport was not always easy so I decided to become an athletics trainer at 16. I started coaching the youngest group and I eventually evolved into a high-jumping trainer. Despite not having the chance to train a lot, I still took part in competitions but I quit as I was constantly injured and needed to practice other sports at school. Until last year I participated in competitions. I chose disciplines that require technique, rather than training (javelin-throwing or putting shot).

I started athletics when I was 12 together with a good friend of mine. She always said I was good at running. I loved all kinds of sports at the time such as tennis, gymnastics, dancing, ballet, but I was best at running. At first it was mainly distance running, but after a while coaches look for talents and I tried out several athletics disciplines such as javelin-throwing, the hurdles, jumping, especially high jumping and eventually I stuck with jumping.

I trained two to three times a week and I almost immediately started taking part in competitions. Our club was relatively small when I started, I think about 200 or 250 members. Now we have nearly 400 members. So, it has evolved from a small club where everyone knows everyone to a bigger club where you only know your group members and the people of your own age.

My parents were not involved with my sport. They drove me or they picked me up, but that was it. I often went on the bike as well since I was already 12 years old and the club wasn't that far away. The club secretary was living nearby so if my parents had a practical question, they could ask him.

When I was 12 or 13, I was allowed to join the next group. I was the youngest. The age range for boys was about 13 until 15-16 years. For girls it started at 13 and you could stay there for the rest of your career. At 16, boys became too good to stay in that group so they could go another level up. After competitions, we all stayed around to watch the older groups. We played in the grass and the mud. And sometimes, although you actually are too young – 13 or 14 years old – you feel butterflies in your stomach when playing with one of the boys. So you provoke him a little, well, you admire those older boys you know. In my opinion today, that's too early to fall in love. You're not even 16 years old yet and you don't have experiences with how relationships work. The biggest problem in our club was that the boys in our group were mainly older and sometimes, if the girl is blindly in love with one of the boys, he can abuse that. He can manipulate you, because you don't realize what you are doing. I knew a boy like that. I was 13 and I think he was 18 years old. One day we decided to meet up before a competition. I really had a crush on him so I went to his house without hesitating. I was so nervous because I didn't know what to expect. I hoped we would kiss. I was too young to realize the risks of my behaviour. But he

abused the fact that I was so young, that I knew nothing and that I had a crush on him.

And then, we were in his room. We started kissing and he started touching me. After a while he also forced me to give him a blowjob. I can't remember if he had an orgasm but I do know that I was completely disgusted. I had never done something like that before but I didn't have the strength to tell him I didn't want to do any of those things. I just couldn't react. To finish up, he gave me a kiss and said 'well done'. Eventually we left to the club, separately in order not to look suspicious if we would arrive together. Since that moment, he never laid eyes on me again. I genuinely felt abused, because of him ignoring me. I was upset and angry for a long time. I couldn't talk to anyone about what had happened. I think it was pretty obvious I had a crush on him but I don't think other people knew what had happened. So no one knew about it, except for my later boyfriend. He was 17 and I was 14. My parents didn't like him, because of that age difference. Our relationship was quite steady and everything went well. We often wrote letters to each other and I once wrote him about that guy and that day. He was so mad when I told him. He wasn't mad for what I did or didn't do, but for what that guy did to me. Although I did want him to kiss me, I cannot say I fully consented with the other things that happened. I was too young to realize what was happening and to make such decisions.

I still see him now and then. His son is a member at the club. He acts quite friendly but I am still ignoring him. Especially since the last couple of years, because I now realize that what he has done was very wrong.

It will sound very strange but this is not the only thing that happened. There was someone else. Every year our club organised a teambuilding weekend with all the elder athletes from 13 or 14 years old until 20, 25 or maybe even 30 years old. I don't really remember how old I was and if it happened before or after I got

together with my boyfriend. Anyway, one year we had to sleep in tents. However, it was a very cold weekend in September back then. The arrangement of the sleeping places was not well-considered at all. Girls and boys were sleeping in the same tents. In my tent, there were two couples and a guy who was 5 or 6 years older than me. He was a coach of another group. That night, I went to bed early. The others were still sitting at the bonfire. I remember I was so cold that night. I was shivering and I didn't even know if I was awake or asleep. After a while that coach went to bed as well. He should have noticed I was so cold since he started rubbing me. At first, he rubbed my body with his hands on top of my sleeping bag. Then, he went in my sleeping bag and rubbed my breasts under my pajamas. He was kissing me as well. I was so cold that I didn't realize what was happening. At one moment, his hand went down. I remember thinking that it was very wrong. Then he took my hand and put it in his own sleeping bag. Until now, the thought of touching him still gives me the shivers. I remember him taking my hand and putting it around his penis. Then he moved my hand up and down. At that moment, I didn't know what he was doing. I don't think he ejaculated since the incident happened in a sleeping bag. Of both the incidents, I think this is the worst one. In my opinion, being touched without consent is more traumatizing than being forced to touch someone else.

The day after the incident I was not sure if it really happened. I wanted to ask him but the day after he got caught with another girl in another tent. Apparently, they have been together ever since, until today. I remember I was really shocked by that.

Later it became clear that other athletes of my age were approached by him as well. He was already accused of theft in our club so the club decided to fire him. He switched to another club and I heard some rumours about similar things in that club. The girls of that other club filed a complaint to the police and I received a

letter to testify and file a complaint as well. I don't know how they knew something happened between him and me because I never told anyone. I did testify but I never knew what happened with the case.

I regularly bump in to him as well. If I see him, I obviously try to avoid him. I am so mad that he's still an active athletics coach. He's training some very talented young athletes in a new club and no one stops him. I suppose there was no trial, otherwise our federation would know about it. I informed the federation about further steps but I never told anyone about what has happened to me. Things like that won't stay a secret. People will look at you differently. Obviously, I am still concerned that he is still doing similar things with other athletes but I suppose someone would know if he were. I think it was isolated incidents.

What has happened to me is not that bad, otherwise I would have told my story a lot earlier. However, I don't really know if what he did to me was worse or less worse than what he did to others. If the incidents involving me were the worst, then I don't think it's worth the effort to file a complaint and to search for information about the trial. If it was the least serious, then something has to happen. But I still think it's not my position to act.

### **3.12 Danny**

I used to train with dogs. You know, with that kind of suit and then dogs can bite in it. I met my wife while doing this. I was working together with her brother for a long time and she came to watch what he was doing at the dog club. I think she found it interesting. And that's how we eventually met. When we were 27 years old we decided to go and live together. Then, after a while, we got married and afterwards divorced. We were separated for two years and a half but we are back together for already ten years now. Everything is going really great between us.

Together with my wife I have a son, Bart, who is 21 years old, and one daughter, Julie, who is 18 years old. They consciously experienced the divorce period. We could notice that on their school grades. When my wife and I got back together, their grades went up again. The divorce made our family stronger. We do not longer take everything for granted now. We, just like anybody else, have to work for everything we want to achieve. We manage to give each other some more freedom and we try not to criticize each other like we used to. As I said, everything is going well in our family.

When the children got into puberty, we did not encounter any problems. But of course, their puberty period was the same time as the trial against Julie's perpetrator. Julie was still a little bit younger, but Bart was showing some pubertal behaviour. For the record, Bart was the one who discovered what had happened to Julie. Julie was nearly 14 years when it happened. I think that was our luck. Although, 'luck' isn't the right word. Because Julie was not 14 years old yet, the court decided she was not old enough to make her own choices regarding the text messages that were sent between her and her trainer. The offender's lawyer argued that my daughter was 'already' almost 14 and must have had an active role in this. They even said that Julie must have seduced her coach. That was so hard to hear.

Our family computer is used in the living room. There was a carnival parade that day in our village. I remember my wife inviting Julie to watch the parade: "Come on, let's have a look!". So, my wife and Julie went outside to take a look. Bart stayed at home and I was at work. Apparently, Julie forgot to log out of her Facebook profile. The Facebook messenger conversation between Julie and her swimming coach was still open on the screen and Bart read it. At first, Bart tried to solve this himself because Julie's trainer was actually his friend and they trained together sometimes. Bart contacted him and asked him what all of this meant. Julie's coach answered that it was a misunder-

standing, it meant nothing, he said. But Bart knew that something was wrong so he told my wife about it. My wife read the whole chat log and started investigating everything.

In the swimming club, there is this lady working as a police officer. We knew her so we immediately contacted her. She advised me not to read the chat log. She knew that if I would read the whole conversation, I would jump into my car, drive to Julie's coach and do something to him. Anyway, after a while I decided to read the chat log. I really did not have the courage to do so, but it was about my daughter, so I had to know.

That woman who works with the police made sure someone who is known with that kind of things picked up Julie to talk to her. Julie was able to tell the whole story during a police investigation. Apparently, the conversations between Julie and her coach did not only happen through Facebook, but also through text messages. Luckily, the police was able to track down those messages easily. After finding and reading those messages, the police also found out that he harassed her several times and raped her.

The weekend after Bart discovered all of this, there was a competition at our club. At that moment, I hadn't read the chat log yet but I knew something was up and I also knew that he was walking around in the club. I had to be there that day because I am the club's photographer. I couldn't help myself but to think that someone had to keep an eye on him but I tried to be calm. The trainer himself didn't know yet that we were filing a complaint with the police. That day he was walking around like he was the man. I think something snapped in me back then. He had texted me that day and said everything was a huge misunderstanding and that he wanted to explain everything. I just ignored that text and decided to inform the club board about what happened immediately. Normally, the board would fire him but apparently, not long before we informed them, he already re-

signed himself. The board notified the parents of Julie's group but they didn't seem to believe us. They did not inform the other parents with young children in the club.

His mother – I think he only told his side of the story to his mother – confronted my wife and defended him. My wife asked her if she knew what was written in that chat log and if she didn't that she had to leave us alone.

When we filed a complaint at the police station they asked Julie many questions. Maybe even inappropriate questions like if there was any penetration. Later that week a video interrogation was taken. It took two hours. We, as her parents, had the chance to accompany her but we refused. We thought it might be easier for Julie to talk about the things that happened to her without our company. Luckily Julie was interrogated by a very kind woman. However, it still remains a very confronting situation for a 13 year old girl. Anyway, my wife and I could sit in the waiting room and two hours later they brought Julie with us. Her eyes were red. On that particular moment it's hard to know what you have to do. Did I have to leave her? Did I have to let her be? Did I have to comfort her? It's difficult as a parent when you go through things like this. You cannot push too hard but you do have to let her know that you are there for her, just in case if she needs a shoulder to cry on.

It was very hard. You know that things had happened. That someone touched my daughter with his filthy hands. Emotions, loads of emotions. Everything: disappointment, rage, the feeling that you failed as a parent because you couldn't protect her. We also were mad at some point. But that disappeared quickly, especially after I had read that chat log. I said to myself that I can't be mad at her, I have to make sure that I don't push her away, I need to help her, care for her, be there for her. The disappointment remained present. She was curious and she had some questions about sexuality and I was disappointed that she didn't talk to her

parents about that. She went to her coach because she trusted him. However, you can see that he is obviously leading the chat conversations. He is manipulating her so that she says what he wants to hear. He misused her curiosity. First, I thought my daughter was early maturing, but actually there is nothing wrong with that. What was wrong, is the fact that he asked her if she fingered herself already. The conversation really built up during 5 to 6 months to a certain point. You could almost feel the tension while reading the conversation. At that point, it was inevitable something would happen.

He came to our house. I know that and I think that is really hard to deal with. At a certain point – when he already raped her at our house – they went to a competition together. We still thought he was the coach of Julie. Apparently when he drove her home, he pulled over and tried to touch her in the car. Julie could stop him by telling him her mom was at home, waiting for her to get home.

Since everything happened, Bart is very protective over Julie. Once, a guy at school said something mean about his sister and apparently three friends had to stop him with all their power! Bart was also the first one to wait outside when Julie's bus was five minutes late. He never accompanied us to trial, he didn't want to. As a parent however, you have to. You have to go to the police, talk to the lawyer, go to the bank, ... Bart said we couldn't talk about anything else anymore.

Julie told us that her coach also had a relationship with a girl of her group. That girl was a little bit older but he also was convicted for that relationship. However, that girl was deeply in love with him and she manipulated Julie's whole swimming group. As a result, they didn't believe Julie and she became the victim, again. Eventually, Julie and Bart transferred to another club. They really loved swimming but the way they were treated in their first club was terrible.



As a family, we had a couple of other families who supported us. At first they were shocked and didn't believe us since that trainer was very popular in the club. Eventually, they supported us throughout the whole process. They took days off to accompany us to trials. I really appreciated that. You know, when you have to enter the trial room you feel really tiny. I am a really strong and big man on the outside, but on the inside... Julie was present on every trial as well. She is a very strong young woman.

He got a two-year suspended sentence in 2015. He had to go in sex offender therapy and he was denied his civil rights. He was also not allowed to study sport anymore. He was in custody for two weeks and he denied everything. After they decided to extend those two weeks he confessed. However, he still denied the things that happened in the car after that competition. Later on, he still lodged an appeal against his sentence. As a result, the compensation fee dropped with 500 euros but the punishment remained the same. What a crazy world we live in.

In my opinion, the fact that he was seen as guilty by the court was the most important. The punishment however, can't be hard enough since he touched my daughter without her consent. Actually, I would rather see him doing some time in prison.

I have changed since everything happened. I used to help everyone with everything and, actually I remember something new: I am quite a handy man and in the period everything with Julie was happening, I was helping the coach's mother with her laminate flooring. I have to admit, I don't help people that much anymore. I need help myself, but there is no one supporting me now. I also became a lot more emotional because I failed as a parent. I couldn't protect her. I remained calm for Julie, but inside I felt so many emotions...

Julie also consulted a victim counsellor. That lady was allowed to accompany Julie to trial. Julie also did some counselling and had some

therapy with a psychologist as well. Now everything is going better. She is more cheerful than she used to. During the trial-period she came home and she came lying in the couch next to me, touching my legs with her back, with her little blanket. She crawled up in her little cocoon and started crying. I then put my hand on her head, just so she knew I was there if she needed me. I never felt more helpless than during those moments. Only thinking of it again, makes me so emotional. Why did I fail to protect my little girl?

I stopped working during the trial. My wife never did, she worked very hard in order not to think about everything. She had a very busy job with a lot of social contact. My job however, is very lonely. I had a lot of time to think and I couldn't concentrate. I suffered from a depression. I didn't do anything anymore and sometimes I just sat there, crying, while nobody was home. I took antidepressants and now I am doing better. Step by step I started working again.

As a family, we became stronger. We made it through together, despite what has happened.

## 4. Results of the interview study

VOICE is a qualitative research project focused on in-depth, narrative research with 'survivors' of abuse in sports contexts. Therefore, the research team was not seeking representativeness or broad generalisations. However, we do consider it important to describe the sample in sufficient detail.

### 4.1 Forms and constellations of sexual violence in sport

Previous research has shown that sexual violence is most accurately conceptualized as a continuum of behaviours or actions (Kelly, 1988) which may or may not include 'bodycontact' (Brackenridge, 2001; Ohlert et al., 2017).

The specific **forms of sexual violence** reconstructed by the survivors in the VOICE-Project are diverse and span across this range, for example, sexist comments about the body; sexual advances (either via digital media or in person); forms of exhibitionism; voyeurism; stalking; being coerced/forced to watch pornography; being coerced/forced to kiss; being forced to send nude pictures; being coerced/forced to have 'phone-sex'; being touched against one's will; being forced to touch and/or masturbate the perpetrator; being coerced/forced to give oral sex; and being raped.

Regarding the quantitative distribution of different forms of sexual violence experienced by the VOICE-participants it shows that: 61% of the participants have experienced forms of sexual violence *with* bodycontact; 58% experienced sexually transgressive behaviours; and 46% experienced sexual violence without bodycontact (multiple responses possible). Many narratives refer to a combination of forms occurring simultaneously or with gradual severity.

Differentiated by gender, male participants more often experienced sexual violence with bodycontact whereas female participants more often experienced sexual violence without body contact (see figure 4). Regarding these numbers, it has to be noticed that the VOICE-participants took part in the project on a voluntary basis. Thus, this data might suggest that rather those men took part in the study who had experienced the so-called „severe“ sexual violence with body contact. In relation to **duration**, half of the participants reported violations that lasted for more than a year (see figure 5). For these 36 cases specifically, the average is 4.7 years, with a range of 18 months to 13 years. While it is vital to understand the length of time to which victims are subjected to sexual violence in sport contexts, it is similarly important to state that a one-time-infringement can also have a most severe effect on the victim, illustrated by Ron's case (above).

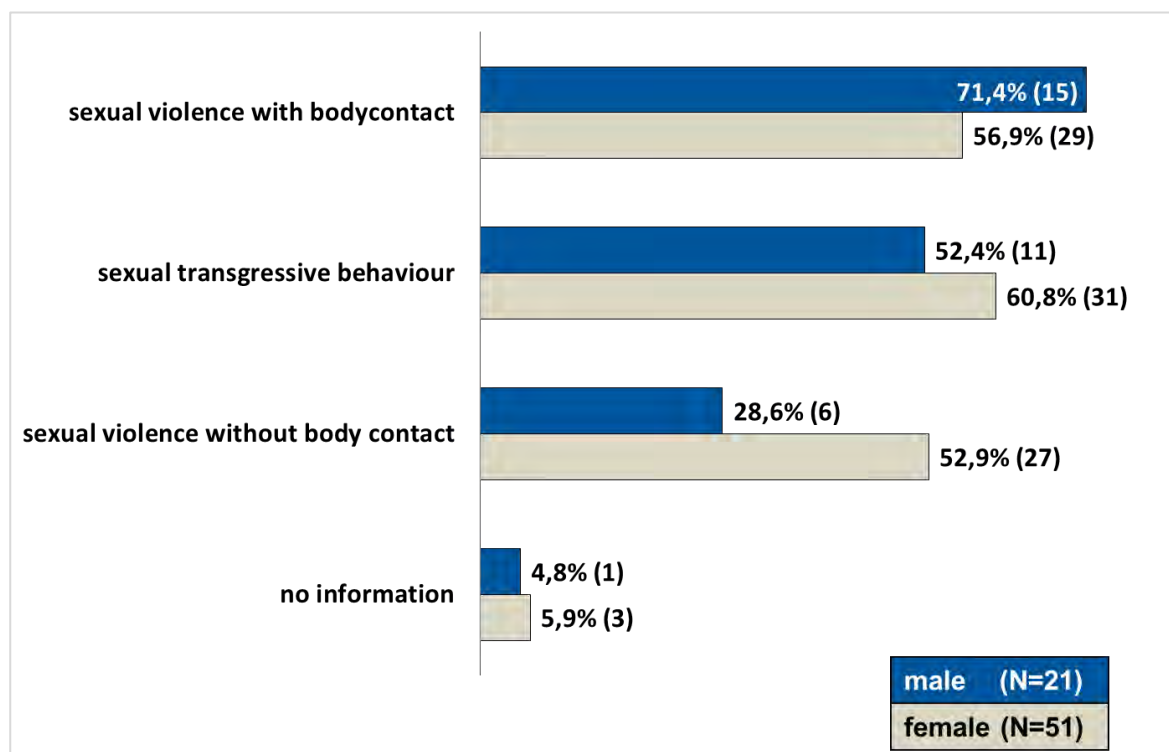
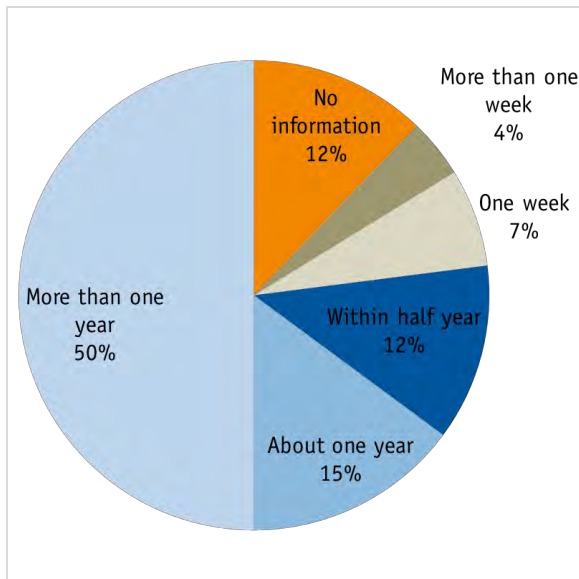


Figure 4: Forms of sexual violence experienced by participants in the VOICE-project, differentiated by gender (multiple responses) (N=72)



**Figure 5: Duration of sexual violence experiences from the VOICE-participants (N=72)**

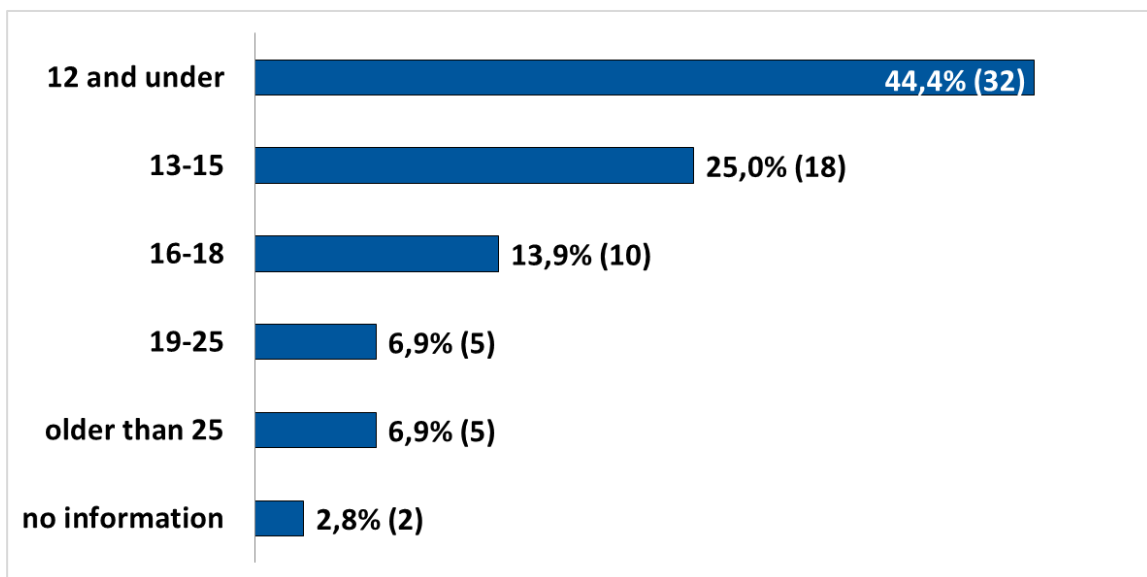
Concerning **age**, approximately 80% of VOICE-participants experienced sexual violence as a child or youth (before 18 years) (see figure 6), which means that the significant majority of cases relate to child (or youth) sexual abuse.

It is also important to understand the **context** in which sexual violence in sport occurs. For VOICE participants, 63% experienced SV in a *sport club* setting; 17% in a *residential sport school*; 14% within an *elite sport setting* (e.g. sport federation or Olympic training centre); 11% in *educational* sport settings (school or

college); and 10% in *other* organisational settings (see figure 7). As the VOICE participants were self-selecting individuals, these data are not representative. However, they clearly indicate that safeguarding activities should be taken seriously in all kinds of organisational contexts that include sport/athletic activity.

Regarding the **type of sports**, a diverse range of different sports were practiced by the victims of sexual violence in this study. The most reports (n=16; 22%) come from the field of football, followed by gymnastics with 9 reports (12%). VOICE is not a representative study, therefore, these data do not indicate that football and gymnastics have a higher prevalence of sexual abuse than any other sports. More likely, these data are indicative of overall participation rates since football and gymnastics are very popular sports in the seven countries represented in the project.

Beyond football and gymnastics, sport-type is reported as follows: athletics (n=6), swimming (n=5), volleyball (n=4), basketball (n=4), karate (n=3), tennis (n=2), taekwondo (n=2), handball (n=2) and with 1 report each: badminton, vaulting, ballet, kickboxing, martial arts, acrobatics, ice-hockey, circus sports, fencing, rowing, judo, hockey.



**Figure 6: Age of VOICE-participants at time of sexual violence experience (N=72)**

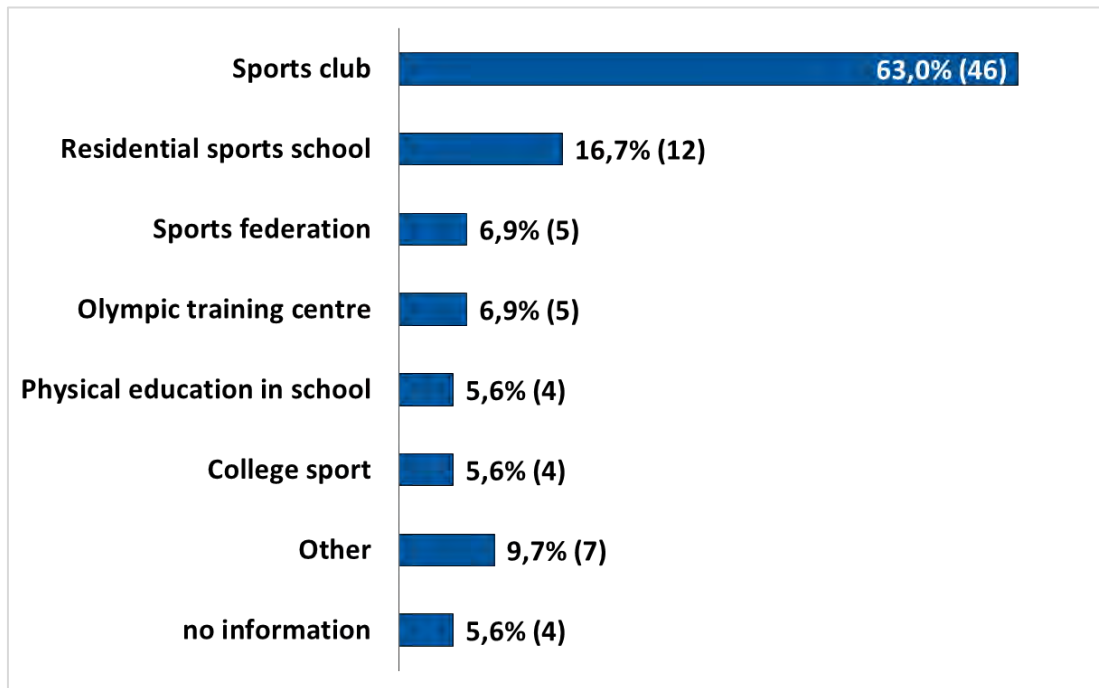


Figure 7: Organisational context, in which sexual violence occurred (multiple responses) (N=72)

In relation to gender and sport-type, applying the categories of *individual* and *team* sports, it is evident that for participants in this study, males were far more likely to experience sexual violence in team sports than the female participants, whereas for individual sports the reverse is true. In addition, the category of *combat sports* included 8 female participants but no male participants (see figure 8).

Regarding the **status or level of sports career** at the time of the incidents, our data show that the majority of the VOICE-participants

were practicing their sport on a performance or competitive level and some at an elite level. In detail: 11% of the participants were performing at a professional international level when experiencing sexual violence, 29% on a professional national level, 30% indicated a competitive athlete status (e.g. in regional leagues) and 29% as a recreational or leisure athlete.

These data might lend support for arguments that the socio-cultural structures of competitive and elite sport foster specific conditions for the emergence of sexual violence. However,

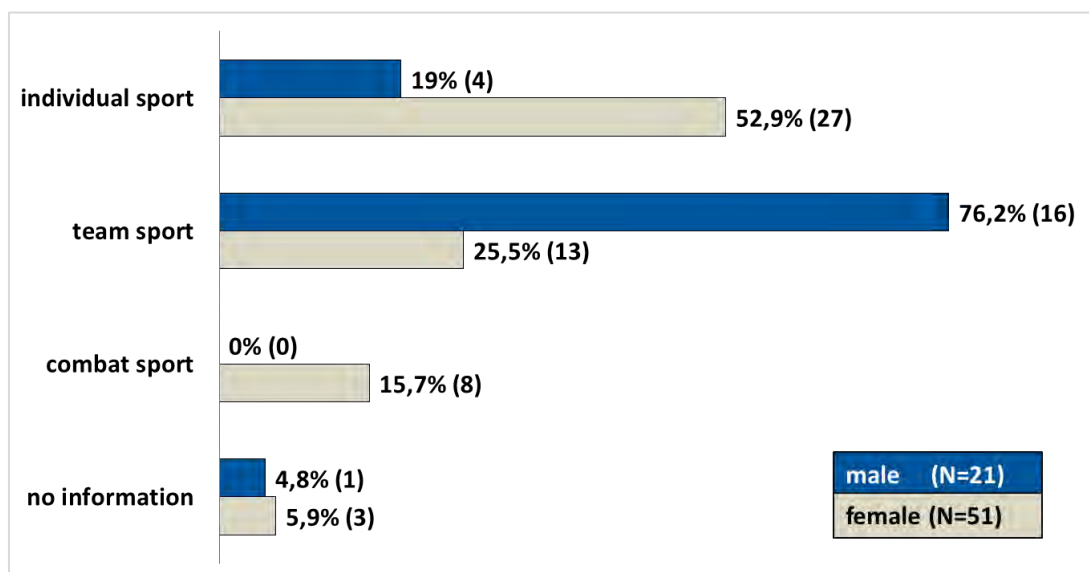


Figure 8: Type of sports at time of sexual violence experience, differentiated by gender (N=72)

again it must be observed that the aim of the VOICE-project was not to establish a scientifically representative sample. Indeed, since almost one-third of participants experienced sexual violence in recreational or leisure sports we would encourage policy-makers to ensure that local, community sport is not neglected when it comes to the introduction and implementation of safeguarding procedures.

#### 4.2 Role or position of perpetrators

In most cases perpetrators were adults and in the majority of reports (n=56, 78%) the perpetrator was the coach of the athlete. Other perpetrators occupied positions such as club board members, mental/psychological support or assistant coaches or peer-athletes (see figure 9).

All perpetrators – except for one – were male. The female perpetrator was a physical education teacher who victimized a female pupil. This picture accords with the overwhelming body of research that has found the majority of perpetrators to be male (e.g. Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is clear that females are also perpetrators of sexual violence against

children, in sport, and more research in this area is needed.

The survivors in the VOICE-project characterize their perpetrators in manifold ways. However, we observe two distinct “types” of perpetrators within the narratives: “the friend” versus “the authoritarian”.

*“I found him rather sympathetic. Well, you thought, that’s a nice and cool guy. Before, we used to have older coaches, that was the old school. But he just came across differently. Yes. He initiated that after each game we got such a statistic, as you do it today, how many times you had the ball, and so on. And somehow we liked that. As a teenager you have relatively few reservations. Oh, such a great new coach. And he had blond long hair, you really liked that one. We all found him really good. He was more of a sympathetic human catcher, one might say.”*

male VOICE-participant

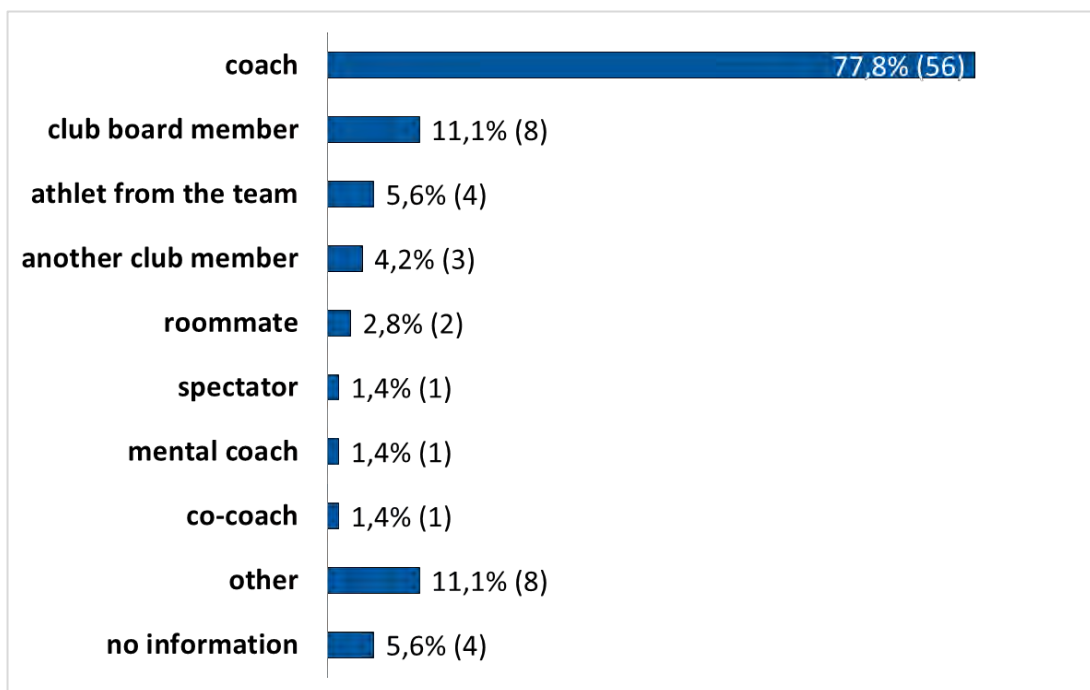


Figure 9: Role or position of perpetrator (multiple responses) (N=72)

*“He was not that strict. ... He was more of a young man who deals with children as if he were a child himself. He was one who could speak very euphorically. Such a guy who is very enthusiastic about things or at least appears so and is so close to the children, because he himself is still like that.”*

female VOICE-participant

Some participants describe a relationship in which the perpetrator takes the role of the sympathetic, charismatic, young or “young-at-heart” buddy, offering various opportunities to have fun, enjoy games and make friends. The young athletes love to be in contact with these characters because they make them feel special and cool; they listen to and empathise with the children/young people. Besides practicing sports, other leisure activities might be part of the program of the perpetrator with the athletes, e.g. going on excursions to the cinema or to a café. These perpetrators seem to have a special gift for motivating the young athletes, which naturally is perceived as a good character trait in the sport surrounding, because it promotes the athletes’ commitment to their sport.

In some accounts it becomes apparent that the sexual offenses of these perpetrators can be seen as part of an initiation ritual into the enticing and risky world of adult sexuality. For the young, dedicated athlete, as well as for those around him/her, it is difficult or impossible to decipher the abusive intentions of these perpetrators, until it is too late, as they work persistently to present themselves as the ideal coach and often secure a position of authority within the organisation.

Furthermore, some narratives describe an authority figure with a respected reputation as an expert, or even an idol, in their particular set

ting. This reputation often extends beyond the athletes to the entourage as well as the families.

*“If you asked me before the abuse, I would never believe that he could hurt anyone. He was very helpful and active in the club – he had a high rank at the board.”*

female VOICE-participant

*“That was also the great conflict ... if I come forward or say something out loud, then I immediately risk receiving complaints concerning reputation ‘murder’. The guy is a popular doctor, he has a big surgery, many people consult him, because he’s such a specialist – and then I approach him for sexual harassment? And that’s just the big fear that I still have, why I do not know how to deal with this situation.”*

female VOICE-participant

*“I remember it very well, that one day he dropped by my parents’ house and this was very impressive, because we could see him in his police uniform with his gun. He worked as a police man. ... we all knew that he was a police man, he had a gun!”*

female VOICE-participant

From the victims’ perspective the high social status of the perpetrators made it very difficult to either withdraw from the abuse, to challenge their abuser, or to disclose it to other people.

Furthermore, some of the characterizations of the highly renowned perpetrators match descriptions of authoritative and powerful figures being obsessed with control over the athletes:



*"We were training machines under [his] command. He insulted us, he treated us with contempt, he pushed us to our physical limits on the court, and then he showered with us after training sessions – I was 12 and had never showered with my father but we had to shower with him. Nevertheless, nothing mattered when you're winning. No comments, no questions, no complaints, not even from other club coaches. With time we all normalized it. After all – this was [perpetrator's name]!"*

male VOICE-participant

*"So, of course I was looking for him all the time in the gym and I wanted him to like me and to find me worthy to spend time with. I desperately wanted to be one of the chosen ones in his group. Now I know there are other ways of teaching and learning. Back then we only knew that one just learns as much as she suffers – the precursor of the famous saying 'no pain, no gain'. We were told every single day about it. Suffering was our destiny in gymnastics. Punishment and fear were its two best allies. How desperate must one be in order to believe that only through suffering, can one improve and become better?"*

female VOICE-participant

In these hierarchical power constellations of sexual exploitation, others in the sport setting appear to tolerate the authoritative and unjust behaviours of the perpetrator. Effectively, through their silence and inaction or through their mean coaching practices, they support the main perpetrator's abusive system. The following interview extract is from an individual who was sexually abused by a renowned sports doc-

tor. The coaches behavior is described as follows:

*"She was mean ... she used sayings like 'you fat cow, you fat pig. Your trousers must be worn out, because of your fat thighs. ... And then she ignored us, no more word for us, no feedback ... we were all afraid of her. ... We felt that, you could also tell by the other trainers, she just had such a power over everything. ... She also manipulated and mauled the others. So everybody was shaking in front of her and we did not dare anything at all. We could not pull ourselves together against her. We tried to please her and in the end it was not possible. No matter what we did, it was not enough."*

female VOICE-participant

Taking this example and similar VOICE-participant accounts, it becomes obvious that in some cases the perpetrators of sexual violence operate within an abusive system that is facilitated and supported by other figures in the field of sport. Therefore, in these cases the other adults in the sports setting did not only fail to protect the young victims, they explicitly supported their abuse (even if they were unaware of the sexual abuse) through their own behaviour of controlling, disciplining and discriminating against the young athletes.

### **4.3 Socio-cultural structures of sexual violence in sport**

In this chapter we will summarize what we learned from the VOICE-interviews about the socio-cultural structures underlying sexual violence within the field of sport.

#### **Sport-specific situations and circumstances**

First, it is important to observe that there are several sport-specific situations and opportuni-

ties which seem to offer easy ways of gaining access to athletes. These include: the necessity for touch/bodily contact during exercising; changing and showering associated with physical exertion; physiotherapy and massage; residential/overnight stays during training camps and competitions; and transport. Indeed, the car appears again and again in the narratives of VOICE participants as the location for sexual violence:

*“He arranged that I was driving in his car on the way to competitions or that it was me who helped with his horse. This way he arranged that we could be alone during practice. Then maybe he had a blowjob or quick sex in some way and then I would show up with the rest of the team like nothing happened.”*

female VOICE-participant

*“After the competition, when we were on our way home, there was another girl in the car. I begged him to drop me off first, but he dropped the other girl off first. That girl lived near me, but he made a big detour and then parked in an abandoned place. Then he started touching me ...”*

female VOICE-participant

*“I come from a small town and started playing [name of sports] at the age of 5. First in a boys team. For girls my sport was not an issue at the time. The club, which at that time was the measure of all things for me and to which I absolutely wanted to go, was about 25 km away from my home. ... The long distance, we were assured by the club, would not be a problem, as there were many volunteers who organised a kind of transport service. They picked up the girls at their homes and brought them to training or games. ... This car service turned out to be a very handy thing for paedophile people. We girls were brought home in one car. I was always brought home last. Again some time alone with the perpetrators. There were two main perpetrators who covered each other. They were networked with other men. So also an ‘exchange’ was always possible.”*

female VOICE-participant

Sport in general and especially high performance sport involves a relatively high level of mobility. Families of many young athletes cannot provide transport on their own and are often dependent on the sport system to get children to venues. However, it is clear that this dependency is a serious risk for sexual abuse. In the above example the young girl was raped multiple times during car drives by the volunteer drivers of the sport club and they even drove her to other places with other men who raped her simultaneously (‘gang-rape’). She loved her sport so much and her family had taken so much effort to be selected at the only sport club in her region, that she did not dare to disclose the abuse.



Apart from such sport-specific situations and circumstances that provide easy access to young athletes, the sport system is marked by specific socio-cultural structures which may foster the emergence of sexual violence.

### **Gender relations and the culture of male hegemony in sport**

Many feminist (e.g. Brackenridge, 2001) and profeminist (e.g. Hartill, 2017) scholars have described the male dominated, masculinist<sup>3</sup> culture of sport as a source of sexual violence in sport. Traditionally, sport developed as an organisation for boys and young men. Even today, despite a strong increase in the sports participation of girls and women, the field of sport is characterized by a high degree of male dominance; this applies, in particular, to leadership in and the media representation of sport.

Research has also highlighted the sexualisation of female athletes in the media. The unequal gender relations and sexualisation tendencies in sport appear to foster a culture of male domination which scholars have described as 'hegemonic masculinity' in sport (Messner, 1990). This culture can contribute to the emergence of sexual violence at a fundamental level: studies of female athletes report that sexual assaults, sexist jokes and beliefs are sometimes part of everyday life in certain sports settings (Brackenridge, 2001; Kirby et al., 2000). Under these conditions sexual remarks are normalized and trivialized in sport. A female VOICE-participant, for example, describes that the coach often massaged and caressed the girls on her team in public:

*"It happened in front of everybody in the club. At big competitions there were a lot of people – also senior players, officials and volunteer helpers ... It was a culture that everybody in the club knew about."*

female VOICE-participant

And another interviewee says:

*"I remember once I talked with somebody about it – him patting our behind – if it was okay? I think we agreed that it was okay because he did not mean anything with it. Maybe it was his style."*

female VOICE-participant

These comments illustrate how the masculinist environment – sexist, heteronormative, authoritarian – prevalent within the field of sport, assists, or provides camouflage for, those men who perpetrate sexual violence against young females.

The 72 interviews conducted for the VOICE-project reveal, that *all reported cases except for one involved a male perpetrator* (see above). Whilst not a representative sample, this study confirms other research findings that the majority of perpetrators are male. Nevertheless, the exceptions need to be considered as well, since they might be much more difficult to detect.

The one young woman in this study, who had been abused by a female offender during childhood (see story from Lisa II above), explains in her interview the difficulties she faced in accepting the abuse *as an abuse*, since the notion of a woman harassing her was beyond her comprehension. Similarly, others in her immediate social environment were apparently unable to see the harassment, or to recognize it for what it was. In this regard it is important to observe the limitations and impact of normative conceptualisations of perpetrator-victim relations;

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<sup>3</sup> According to Brittan (2001, 53) 'Masculinism is the ideology that justifies and naturalizes male domination. ... [It] takes it for granted that there is a fundamental difference between men and women, it assumes that heterosexuality is normal, it accepts without question the sexual division of labour, and it sanctions the political and dominant role of men in the public and private spheres.'

the male-perpetrator/female-victim paradigm can serve to obscure the abuse of males and those victimized by females.

*"... I was not able to understand it, why it had to be a woman. I thought, nobody will believe me anyway. And I almost imagined that I am like her. I always looked for answers in myself and she tried to persuade me for years, that I'm actually a lesbian like her, which was not true, but somewhere I had to adapt. And that made me ... crazy."*

female VOICE-participant

*"... always man and woman, male and female, nothing else, black or white. Now in my case it was a woman and everyone probably thought, well, motherly feelings, friendship. I do not know what they thought, but I do not think anyone came up with the idea that she could have other thoughts as well. And that's the fallacy."*

female VOICE-participant

Almost one third of the victims in the VOICE-study are male. Since the field of sport is highly attractive for boys and men, research as well as policy has to take into account that boys and men can also be victimized in this field – a fact that might be difficult to accept in a surrounding that is strongly characterized by masculinist ideals and values. Some of the male survivors in the VOICE-project confirm that as boys or young men they were socialized in and through such values within their sport environment:

*"If I now look back at my club, then I also think of the adult male members, who had been a role model for me. I remember the following situation: I was a teenager, 16 or 17, we won a game in a championship and the first team with the adult players had also won; and after the matches we first drank a beer. And then these gentlemen of the first team had the idea, that we all should drive into a night bar. Men, real men, yes, and we boys with 16 had to join them. They dragged us boys to the night bar, where I did not know what to do. Until today, I still remember how I wanted to disappear and that I felt hot and cold, extremely uncomfortable, but it was normal for the men. And then they brought a woman and made her sit next to me and they had a lot of fun. ... this was the milieu, this men's world, where each man makes himself larger than the other...."*

male VOICE-participant

If young men in such surroundings experience sexual abuse – as the individual in the above extract did – it is very difficult for them to disclose the abuse. Stories of male victimization are very seldom told in the field of sport (Hartill, 2014). Thus, it is a significant challenge for male survivors to reveal their experiences as they are at extreme odds to the norms of the environment into which they have been acculturated. In other words, real men (sportsmen) are heterosexual, strong and dominate others – and they are definitely not victims. Therefore, many psychological problems are encountered by boys, or young men, faced with the necessity of integrating 'homosexual' (forced or coerced) sex into their developing male identity.

## The culture of trust, family and loyalty

Sport organisations are built on close relationships of trust and loyalty. Very often members have known each other for a long time and have well-established friendships, or even belong to the same family. It is evident from accounts in the VOICE-study that the relations in the teams, clubs and federations are based on a very close interplay between the private sphere and sport sphere. The sport clubs are described as small social communities with very close ties, based on voluntary work, which is broadly appreciated and cannot be criticized. This causes an extreme loyalty and specific forms of nepotism. The Austrian skier Nicola Werdenigg recently wrote a book about her experiences of sexual violence in the Austrian World of Skiing and with relation to the social characteristics of the sport surrounding, in which the violence occurred, she writes: "It's like it happens in the family" (Werdenigg, 2018: 61).

These close and familiar relations made it difficult for many of the VOICE-interviewees to speak out.

*"Well ... it was my coach. He is the same age as my father. This somehow plays a role. My father sometimes joined our tours to competitions. He did all the organisation and financial things. And the two got along well ... The coach got along so well with my dad, so I always thought ... I'm the spoilsport ... who will destroy everything if I say something now."*

female VOICE-participant

The bond and loyalty to this social group in sport is so strong that several of the VOICE-participants described how much they feared to spoil the close community with their negative experiences and accusations of abuse. Thus, they kept silent; and these feelings are difficult

to set aside, even for those who have suffered extreme degradations within these settings.

*"I still feel that loyalty. I still have the feeling I do not want to be responsible for giving them a hard time for what they did to me back then ..."*

female VOICE-participant

## Selection processes in sport

In many of the VOICE-interviews the selection processes of being "the chosen one" for a specific team, a competition or a club are an important topic when it comes to understanding the social structures underlying sexual violence in sport, perhaps especially in the field of elite sport. To be selected for a squad or team is often preceded by a long period of commitment to a specific sport and/or team/club: perseverance, hard work and discipline often characterise sports participation, at all levels, but above all 'commitment' to the sports enterprise, however it is configured, is considered a necessary trait for full acceptance into the (highly selective) world of competitive sport.

Athletes subjected to sexual violence are often threatened, implicitly or explicitly, with rejection (being 'dropped') from the team/squad/club, etc. This may be a direct threat from the perpetrator but also may come from non-abusing adults who are influenced by the perpetrator. For the young athlete, deeply embedded and invested in the culture of sport as well as their own personal athletic success, the fear of rejection and failure can often trump any other considerations. Furthermore, the families of athletes are often required to invest heavily (time, money) in their child's or children's sports career, frequently making sacrifices in other areas of life just to enable their child to 'have a shot'. These circumstances place added pressure on young athletes to suffer sexual violence in silence. They do not want to disappoint their families. The pressure of being the "chosen one" and how it influences

abusive situations is described by Marcel (see his fuller narrative above):

*“So, I did a tremendous jump from playing with my schoolmates in matches that were neither here nor there, to a premiership club. I became “a chosen one.” We were 12 chosen ones and there were thousands out there dying to be in our skin. I didn’t feel the pressure right away, but like drizzle, the sport’s responsibilities and the meaning of being part of something so big completely soaked me. Every season fighting to win the Catalan and Spanish championships, fighting for being one of the chosen ones to represent Catalonia and Spain. Every season 2-3 players were kicked out, 2-3 players came to replace them. For years I saw them coming and going. The pressure to do well and achieve titles was everywhere.”*

male VOICE-participant

For many young people in sport being part of a successful group of athletes is an important resource for strengthening their self-confidence and sense of belonging. Some of the VOICE-interviewees described clearly how much they were in need of their sport group, when for example they faced difficult situations at home (e.g. parents divorced, illness of family members) or when their social life had already so strongly centralized on sport that they did not have other possibilities for making social contacts.

*“Doing my sport was such a confirmation and that was one of the reasons why I could not stop it. I could have just said, I do not want to play anymore. Then it would have been over. But that did not work, because I always got so much confirmation and my sport was pure joy. ... And they were my friends and this whole climate in the club was my world. It was so special to be there and I did not have anything else. It was my world.”*

female VOICE-participant

### **Disciplining regimes and the chilly climate**

Many sociological studies show that, in sport, the production of success and the avoidance of failure dominates communication and discourse. This not only applies to highly competitive sport at the national and international level, but also to competition-oriented sports in local community sport (where the vast majority of children experience sport). This dominant orientation is fundamentally accompanied by structures that can be considered risky for the abuse of power and the concealment of sexual violence.

The overriding focus on success, in training and competition, leads to extreme forms of body-discipline, including ignoring (or even seeking) pain. Thus, children and adolescents are frequently socialised within a culture in which risky behaviour is normalized and often valorised. Athletes who are particularly focused on sporting success, and who experience a high performance pressure in their training environment, develop a corresponding willingness to risk their health (Thiel et al., 2010).

This culture also plays a role in the emergence and concealment of sexual violence. Many of the VOICE-participants described the predominant principle of “no pain, no gain” in their sport environments. This dominant narrative naturally fosters an attitude that an athlete must comply with every demand made upon them. In some of the abusive settings described in our study the coach and the entourage foster a climate that subordinates individuals (‘athletes’), their rights and their welfare, well below ‘winning’. Thus, the athletes are incapacitated from taking their own decisions and obviously such social structures can foster the abuse of power:

*“So I can remember that our coaches tormented us mercilessly ... If you did not you bring your success, then ‘bye’. If you cannot handle it, ‘you can go’. And that’s not how it should be. Sport should not be torture, but something that I would like to give myself and also want to achieve and that I do for myself and for no one else. And this is the power the coaches had over us ... It was all controlled. The successes, the training, the whole daily routine – everything – everything was predetermined.”*

female VOICE-participant

In some narratives the exploitation of the athletes’ bodies is described in harrowing ways, as for example in this story of a female gymnast who lived in a boarding school for sport as a child:

*“They told us to tell nothing at home, neither what we got to eat or to drink nor how everything worked ... and that we were not allowed to eat chocolate or cakes at home, because we had to hold our weight ... and when we came back from the weekend and if we had gained weight, we had to run as a punishment. We had to run until we could not anymore. ... I remember that one of us spat blood when running and she was crying and the coach just said: ‘You can cry elsewhere, but not in front of us.’ And there were these stairs in front of the boarding home ... and she had to run up and down until she finally fainted. They just carried her away... It was shocking for us. ... And they never had a smile for us. There were only insults: ‘You are too fat, you have too much weight. Look at you. What should become of you? If you do not improve, you can go home, you can pack your things.’ All these insults. There was never a smile or a praise. .... I remember that I had problems with a specific exercise at the bars, I was afraid of this exercise... And if it did not go well, he placed me in front of the wall and he banged my head against the wall.”*

female VOICE-participant

Obviously, such a vicious climate fosters abuse and reduces athletes to training machines – instruments – removing their self-determination and free will. Where there is little or no external scrutiny, such a climate may be relatively easy to establish and the perpetrators regime – the norms and attitudes of the whole setting – develop into a form of total institution that has both full control over the young athletes in its midst as well as the capacity to conceal activities that may contravene wider norms (Heitmeyer, 2012).



#### 4.4 Survivors remembering sexual violence experiences and the emotional framing

A remarkable characteristic of the narratives in the VOICE-project is that the narratives of abuse and harassment are framed by different kinds of emotions related to the abusive situations. It shows that the survivors have different ways of categorizing the emotional states they went through when experiencing the abuse. While almost all survivors from the current point of view categorize the experienced sexual violence as being inappropriate, denigrating and unjust, it becomes obvious that at the time of the experience the emotions vary largely.

In many cases the survivors express feelings of discomfort, anxiety, of being abused and violated, very often going in line with the feeling of being paralyzed and unable to stop the violation:

*“And then it came ... to a sexual assault when he drove me alone in the car home. Suddenly, well, that's a feeling that I still have in me today, suddenly reaching out to my breast. Really I was so baffled, without any preliminary talk of anything. And I know that my heart raced and I think today I would kick, scream, hit back or anything else. I was always paralyzed. At that time I had no competence for such a thing, then to defend myself. That made the dilemma very big and I always slipped into a greater depression. My mom realized that, had a clue that there was something wrong in the [sport] area, she said. And I did not say anything because I knew that if I said that I would have to leave.”*

female VOICE-participant

In some cases the memory of being abused is also fragmented and unclear, not knowing what happened exactly, especially when the experiences took place during childhood:

*“I really only remember... that we did pass through the dark sports field, through the dark halls, there was no one left, light out and in the end, where his room was, there, through the hall, you had seen the light where we knew you had to go in there. I know, I had to close the door then, I was wondering, I asked, well, ‘why, there's no one there anyway and why close the door?’. ... so I was supposed to shut the door and undress. And I said, ‘no, I do not want to. Why?’ And I remember that he walked around me, too, with his hands on my shoulders. That I think I was sitting on a stool or had to stand up and ... that he said, “look at you, you're pretty and you look great. ... you do not need to be ashamed.’ ... And I do not know how I got home. ... I remember that I once sat in front of such an apparatus. Then I thought he had hypnotized us...”*

female VOICE-participant

Whereas in the above mentioned cases of sexual violence the interviewees relate to their experiences as something clearly traumatic and stressful, in other incidents of sexual violence the feelings were ambivalent:

*“And this coach then managed to ensnare me, then he invited me to his private apartment. Naive, as I am, I went there. He said nice things to me. And, yes, it ended with ... so he deflowered me, so to speak. There was no foreplay, no nothing. And I know, that it was just awful, it hurt me beastly, I was horrified. I bled without end. ... So you can imagine what that means to have your first intercourse in such a way. And that was also ambivalent for me, because I thought, oh, now I'm finally a woman. ... and he had chosen me, so I reinterpreted that. And I knew something was wrong with it. He also told me not to tell anyone, not anyone.”*

female VOICE-participant

And in a few cases the sexual relation with an adult coach is even described as something positive out of the perspective of a young person who had not had any sexual experiences before:

*“We cuddled together, we did petting, we brought each other to orgasm. And that was nice. ... I had my first orgasm with him and I thought that was nice. It felt good. ... yes, there was a new world opened. My perception of this physical contact was never, was not negative. It was not a compulsion. He never somehow threatened me or made any ultimatums.”*

male VOICE-participant

The interviewee reconstructs his sexual violence experience not as a violent experience at first hand. Only a few years later, he realized that the coach had been abusing and manipulating him.

Furthermore, in some accounts concerning the so-called “milder” forms of sexual harassment,

the interviewees indicate that this somehow belonged to the usual practices in the sport surrounding and that the behaviour was tolerated and did not arouse strange or negative emotions:

*“Our first coach, Mr. XXX, he always had a cigar, tracksuit. And he had an office, you can not call it an office, it was a storeroom somehow. And he always measured us in there. .... Yes, completely. Every part of our body. Each year. ...Everything. He also measured the penis. And of course also touched. But you did not feel that was bad. I do not know, I do not want to accuse him of that. But it was still – you would find it strange today. And then, all this was tabulated and written down. Yes. Always at the beginning of the season. ... It was not a bad thing. And we always laughed about it a bit. But we really liked him, ... Maybe it was just a harmless satisfaction for him or something. Nowadays it would be unthinkable. Well, we just let him do it ... So I am sure that I have told this to my mother or father. And it was completely fine.”*

male VOICE-participant

All in all, it can be seen from the emotions described in connection with the experience of sexual violence that these were not always directly and clearly registered by the victims as violence or abuse. The sexual incidents are also interpreted ambivalently, in some cases they are normalized or even transferred into positive feelings at the moment. Only with hindsight is it possible for the survivors to feel and label the abuse as injustice and violation of their dignity. This underlines how difficult it might be in some situations to decipher sexual offenses as inadequate and something to stop from the perspective of those affected as well as the people around who might witness it.

## 4.5 Consequences and Impact on survivors

The abuse that our participants suffered as children often had an immediate negative impact on them. This impact then invariably led to a range of consequences for the child, and later, the adult. In this section we include some examples to illustrate the range of impacts and consequences of abuse in sport.

For many of our participants the experience of sexual contact with a trusted adult was frightening, confusing and bewildering:

*"In the time after [the abuse], it was all very chaotic because of so many feelings. On one hand, I didn't want to let go of that person [coach], who meant so much to me. But at the same time, I was so afraid to be alone with him again. I was ashamed of what had happened, and I was sure that I didn't want to tell anyone. The person who had my confidence, who I was entrusted with, had become my sex offender. I felt trapped in those feelings of fear and dependence. I didn't understand what was happening."*

male VOICE-participant

For some the experience was so confusing and difficult to accept and cope with that they doubted and questioned themselves:

*"I was still confused. I was still thinking 'that couldn't have happened, it couldn't have happened'. But actually when something like that happens to you, there's no way you can deny it. There's no way you can make it up ... everything about me felt black. It was totally 'What am I gonna do?'"*

male VOICE-participant

However, others had felt they were in a loving relationship but recognition of the true nature of the relationship led to psychological problems:

*"We had intercourse, and he indicated that he didn't care about his girlfriend. It was the last time, and it was very uncomfortable. I regretted afterwards, because I could see now, that he had been using me. Slowly I realized ... About a year later, I started developing mental issues. I went to a psychiatrist."*

female VOICE-participant

In some cases, children experienced severe and complex physical and psychological reactions in the days, weeks and months following the onset of abuse. One participant was violently raped whilst asleep after his coach drugged him and other boys in a junior football team:

*"When I got home, I tried to work out how I could stay away from people and keep myself together. I think part of your brain just goes into a survival mode. I didn't want to go to the youth club, didn't want to mix with anybody 'cos I was frightened if anyone said 'we know what's happened to you'. ... I had severe stomach and bowel pains. I used to get on the floor trying to find a position to make it feel better. I'd never put two and two together – that it could've been because of him raping me. I went to see a doctor about it. I think the doctor told my mum what it was but it was kind of swept under the carpet. I don't blame her, she was a good woman – she just wasn't able to cope."*

male VOICE-participant



Unsurprisingly, abuse in sport can lead to some children dropping-out of the sport that s/he had previously been heavily engaged in as well as having wider detrimental impacts, such as on the child's education:

*"I did not talk to anybody about it, but I had very bad feelings concerning him. I found him evil, I really hated him. After this camp I went to training for a few more weeks and then after the summer holidays, I just did not go to practice anymore. I just stayed at home and did not tell anyone that I quit football. I skipped school as well. For weeks I just did not go ... I was expelled from school ... Football had been my life ..."*

male VOICE-participant

*"What I also remember very well is the horrible, horrible feelings that I had. I was crying pretty much every day. My grades went completely down when I was in high school."*

female VOICE-participant

Others managed to continue their sports career, nevertheless, the long-term impact of the abuse contrived to limit their athletic potential:

*"Around the age of 17 I was spotted to play for a club ... The first year I played I won two prizes and all that stuff was making me feel better. I was chosen to go for a trial with a professional football club but because I'd got totally 'hammered' the night before I was taken off after 20 minutes."*

male VOICE-participant

Many VOICE-participants said that the experience had had such a negative impact on them that they had not been able to talk to others about it until many years later, if at all. For some participants, the psychological impact of the abuse and the effort to conceal it over a long period of time had long-term consequences for their mental health and their ability to lead stable and secure lives. For some, this manifests in self-harm, self-destructive behaviours and a reliance on alcohol or other substances as a means of coping. Many of our participants have sought out or been referred for therapeutic counselling or psychotherapy:

*"I started seeing a therapist due to my GP's recommendation ... After realizing I was most probably having anxiety attacks, she referred me to a psychotherapist as well. I began seeing him regularly. However, he believed that the source of my problems was most probably my sports training. I did not believe him because I still liked going to practice and I was happy to train. It seemed he was right. In April 2016, I started taking anti-depressants because of suicidal thoughts."*

female VOICE-participant

*"During my thirties I was very depressed. I saw a psychiatrist who was the first person I'd gone into detail with about the tennis club. It's a big thing when you talk about it for the first time as an adult. A huge thing. ... I went through a stage of self-harming, cutting my arms."*

female VOICE-participant

*"I set up a business ... I didn't like authority, bosses and stuff, so it was good to work for myself. I ran that for about 15 years and then totally went off the rails. That old voice in my head came back to bug me, 'you're not good enough, you can't be doing this'. I had a weakness with drink that led me to go over the top. So my business collapsed. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and got a kicking – a bad head injury – so I was off too long to hold the business together. But it was almost as if there was an element of self-destruct – I went to an area where there was possibly trouble ... Before that I'd jumped off a train before it stopped, I was drunk. I hit the platform and had cuts all over my head. I think I still wanted to be alive but it was a bit of attention seeking."*

male VOICE-participant

Many victims choose not to make an official complaint and go to considerable effort to conceal their abuse, often in order to protect those close to them (e.g. the family).

One feature of abuse by a sports coach, especially where the coach or the child achieves elite status, is that the abuse of one individual may be revealed when other victims make official disclosures. The impact of this on the individual can itself be deeply disturbing and difficult to cope with.

*"I got a phone call from a friend of mine that said it was in the newspapers, [perpetrator] had been arrested and there's all sorts of talk going on, and she said to me 'I wonder what that's about' and I said 'oh, I don't know, haven't a clue' ... but there was a huge somersault in my stomach and I felt sick ... from that moment something inside me started erupting or seeping out, because the pain that I had for so long locked deep away, now it was seeping out. ... My mother asks me one or two questions, but I shut her down straight away ... I wouldn't speak to her about it. It's growing inside me, but I'm still not talking about this. But inside is seriously rotten. I'm working really really hard, I spent all my time working. But now there's a court case and he's sent to prison and everyone's talking. ... he goes to prison on the Friday, and on the Monday I'm going to work and I'm listening to the radio host speaking to a swimmer and her mother. And I'm recognizing this voice ... it's the girl who changed in the changing-room next to me. The only way I can describe it is – a train ran over me. I went in and I made a phone call to a friend and the first thing I said to her was 'oh my god this is true. I'm one of those girls'."*

female VOICE-participant

Some of our participants had made official complaints to the police and talked about the additional burden this placed upon them. The following extract also illustrates the long-lasting hold that offenders can have over those they have victimized:

*"Next thing I know, I'm going to the [police], I'm in the [police] station – I'm reporting! I thought I was just gonna walk in and say 'he's in prison, he was my swimming coach and he did that to me' and I'd go home. It doesn't work like that. It was horrendous. They just ask you question after question after question and detail, detail. So I shut down, even in that interview I told them very little of what he did to me, because it was too much. I'd never told anyone and next thing you're being ... so at the end of that, after however many interviews, she asked me to sign the statement and then she said to me 'now we're going to have to go to the prison' to interview him. And I lost my life! I just said – my actual words were 'What? You mean you're going to tell him I've told you?' Now I'm about 28, 30 years of age and I'm in the police station, he's in the prison, and I'm frightened that they're going to tell him that I've told on him. Even at that age. It took her a good few hours to calm me down before I even signed that statement."*

female VOICE-participant

The legal process and especially the experience of going to court can also cause a great deal of anxiety. Unfortunately, the experience recounted by one of our participants is all too common:

*"I went to read my victim statement in court. I was met at the side door and led down some stairs to a waiting room, the door opened and I was told to sit there – with him [perpetrator] 6 or 7 yards away! I really am the most non-aggressive person in the world, but I'm getting angrier and angrier, I'm bubbling ... but then the door opens and the person that opened that door looked straight at me and said '[perpetrator's name]'? And I said 'it's not me' and I was just about to lose the plot completely! Then, it's not an exaggeration, they're talking over the top of me! ... So I'd gone at this stage, completely had a meltdown – crying and very emotional, very angry. The official came out, could see the state I was in and I just said 'I wasn't supposed to see him. I can't believe it, I told everybody, I've got the letters, I've got the emails, the courts knew, the CPS knew, my barrister knew, witness protection knew, everybody knew I wasn't supposed to see him, it was the one thing! I wanted to go into the courtroom but I didn't want to see him. So he's saying to me 'you need to come in' and I was like 'are you real? There's no way I can go in the courtroom now!' And then my professional head is saying 'you need to go in and you need to keep calm because you need him to go to prison', so I'm sitting there and I'm taking a few deep breaths and I'm trying to compose myself ... and so I went in. And I got to the door and as I got to the door I said to this guy 'the screens are up though aren't they?' and basically he pushed me out the door. I could then hear a kerfuffle, I can hear 'he wants screens up, the screens are supposed to be up'. The judge then asks him [perpetrator] to leave through the back of the court while I'm then led to the screens. It was a joke, an absolute joke! I went in eventually and read my statement."*

male VOICE-participant

Such responses by the authorities are likely to hinder recovery. It is also evident that the conviction of a perpetrator does not mean that a victim has overcome the harm done to them and the emotional impact continues to have consequences for victims which can be very serious, even life-threatening:

*“I suppose it’s not until he pleaded guilty that really it all then hit me, that this was actually true. But for me and for many like me, that’s what you have to live with and for me, like yeah, I just couldn’t live with it. It was too much. So I suppose that’s what led me to take a massive overdose. In the hospital – the psychiatric ward – I was locked in. I didn’t know. I didn’t even know I was locked in. I came out on the condition that I would go into a secure hospital. But I had so much damage done to my body because I threw myself down the stairs. I’d become really really bad again and I was seriously not living on this planet. I was locking myself in my house and at that stage my parents had taken my car off me ... those thoughts had always been there – but now I was acting them.”*

female VOICE-participant

#### **4.6 Listening to survivors and understanding how their accounts can help sports organisations prevent abuse**

Many VOICE-participants told of practices and behaviours that should have been challenged and reported by other adults in the organisation. These behaviours do not express, directly, the *sexual* character of abuse, but show how sport cultures in some clubs or teams might be rooted in unjust and inadequate interactions by coaches or other staff members that should not go unnoticed by the adults in this field.

*“It all began with her [physical education teacher at elite sport school] talking to me regularly. She sat next to me during lunch hours and told me about her private life. Soon we were on a first-name basis. ... I was flattered. We exchanged mobile numbers and she started to send me text messages ... At the end of the physical education classes, she always kept me in the gym talking with me. I remember that I wanted to join my classmates but she always managed to involve me in conversations and I did not dare leave her. At school, she was always around me. She picked me up at classes, took me for lunch, talked to me in the school yard and then she even started to meet me outside the school-building. She was always there, walking and talking with me in the school building, driving me around in her car.”*

female VOICE-participant

*"The gym was an enclosed environment. Nobody from outside knew what was going on there. He told us every day that in order to excel, we couldn't get distracted: we couldn't share with anyone what we were doing; we shouldn't waste our time listening to music; watching films; or spending time with our families. In order to reach the top only gymnastics could be in our lives. We were a very hermetic group. He was always insistent, day-in-day-out, telling us that if we told our mums that they would come and talk to him and if that should happen we would no longer be able to train here. This was only referring to the insults, humiliation and hitting during trainings; he never needed to tell me anything about silencing the [sexual] abuses – that was taken for granted. The level of control within our lives and thoughts outside the gym was tremendously scary. The fear in our bodies was noticeable, but nobody said anything."*

female VOICE-participant

Some victims recall that particular features would mean some children were at greater risk, according to proclivities of the offender.

*"He selected the players he knew would never talk. Thinking about it now, he used to take the players that were physically more developed home by car. That was two more and me. The other two haven't spoken out yet. I was the quiet, introverted, silenced one; another was having problems at home, the father had just abandoned them; and the third one wasn't a very good player yet he stayed on the team all those years – I wonder why?"*

male VOICE-participant

Clearly it is not advisable to generalize from these examples, but it is well established that offenders will go to considerable lengths to conceal their crimes. Therefore, selecting children that may already be vulnerable, or creating circumstances to ensure that the child either won't speak-out or will not be believed if s/he does, are common aspects of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

*"My coach convinced everybody in the club that he was right. He also started telling false stories about us."*

female VOICE-participant

In many cases, it was evident that others knew about the abuse. In the extract below the offender's activities were an 'open secret' amongst other adults and even a source of amusement:

*"He was renowned for being inappropriate with the boys and it was a big joke amongst the adults. They used to refer to him as 'Botter' [reference to anal intercourse] and that was the big joke, "are you going to see Botter?" He would get you in his office and he would ... interview you basically: "your football's coming along fine, you're really doing well, we've had scouts from [professional club name], I'm immensely proud of you ... er, have you ever shagged a lass [female]?"; and "do you masturbate?"; "do you bring up much?" And he would go into the intimate details of it. All the time he would have his hand on your knee or your inner thigh and he'd be rubbing your inner thigh. ... But when you came out of his office the adults would be "ooh you've been in with Botter!"*

male VOICE-participant



In some cases, where complaints were made, sport organisations took the side of the coach and denigrated the child:

*“We called the police and they confirmed that it was illegal. When he continued on the board, my parents contacted the federation. They knew about the trial but continued to support him because they thought that I had a teenage crush and wanted revenge for him breaking up with me. Moreover, I was almost 18 years old. One of them was angry because of my mother’s letter and wrote back, that we should stop making a big fuss as I wasn’t badly neglected or pregnant.”*

female VOICE-participant

For many, the difficulty of telling their families was too great for them to cope with. In addition, children would want to protect their parents from the anguish and guilt of discovering they had unwittingly condoned the abuse. Many felt forced to remain silent and this in itself had a negative impact on them.

*“I knew that what happened was horrendously wrong. I felt emotionally stuck. There was no way I could speak to my dad about it, because of how he was. My mum would have just died on the spot, there was no way she could cope with that. So I became angry.”*

male VOICE-participant

It can be seen from the emotions described in connection with the experience of sexual violence that these were not always directly and clearly registered as violence or abuse. Often the perpetrator will cultivate the relationship to appear as a ‘normal’ affectionate, sexual relationship between consenting individuals, whilst at the same time controlling and coerc-

ing the child into concealing the relationship, usually from those closest to them:

*“We had like very set times when we could talk on the phone – he was also a player, he was 29 when I was 16. He would call me after his basketball practice as that was the only time we could talk, so it was all very controlled. I remember he needed to take me into the forest to hide and have sex, like a prostitute literally ... and I invented a fake boyfriend so I could get away – like I had to create a fake boyfriend to make sure my parents were not going to be suspicious.”*

female VOICE-participant

More than one participant explained the ambiguity and complexity of the situation they were faced with:

*“I could say, even though those times in my life were the worst of my life, they were the happiest. Because when I was swimming – I loved my swimming, I loved my friends, I loved being part of the team. So when I look back, or I meet swimmers and we’d sit and talk, we laugh, we don’t talk about that. Or I’d meet swimmers from other clubs who hadn’t been abused and we remember the fun times, ‘cause there was fun times. It’s probably the friendships and the fun times that, you know, kept me there. But while it was the worst time, there was actually a joy and a happiness in me with my swimming, and I know that some people, they look and they say ‘how can you say that?’ but it was, it was, there was also a happy time when I was in that pool.”*

female VOICE-participant

This clearly has implications for how abused children present themselves, or appear, to adults. It might be assumed that children who are being abused would *appear* to be in a constant state of extreme distress or anxiety, therefore, relatively easy to identify. Yet it is clear that this is not the case for many children. Often children felt trapped by the circumstances of their sporting commitment and their desire to achieve as well as expectations from parents and others. Therefore, they would go to considerable lengths to ensure their secret was *not* exposed. Whilst children may be experiencing a perpetual state of anxiety because of the abuse they are being subjected to, this anxiety may also and equally motivate them to work hard, on a daily basis, to conceal their emotions and feelings from others, especially those in their immediate vicinity. Undoubtedly, this effort takes its toll on individuals and does so in myriad ways.

This illustrates both the difficulty and importance of being able to ‘spot signs of abuse’ within children. This is perhaps especially difficult in activities such as sport where abused children may *appear* to be navigating the usual challenges of childhood and adolescence with great success. That is, sports participation, especially success, can serve as a proxy for a healthy and happy child. This emphasizes the need to communicate with children and take a genuine interest in their lives.

*“In all that time, nobody at the school contacted me and asked me whether I am okay. People were watching me and I noticed them talking about me behind my back. None of the teachers managed to ask me. They only watched me and in all that time I was thinking: ‘Please, if only one of you would ask me, I would tell you everything.’ This never happened. Everybody saw it – nobody said a thing.”*

female VOICE-participant

Therefore, talking with and listening to children – effective and meaningful communication – is a crucial aspect of the prevention of sexual abuse in sport. Adults in sport must be prepared to see beyond the surface-level and be sensitive to behaviour that may indicate a child is experiencing harm that has little or no physical signs. Such behaviour may take many different forms, but where genuine and meaningful relationships exist between adults and children in sport, it is far more likely that behaviour indicating harm will be identified as well as more likely that children will feel able to ‘open-up’ about issues that are distressing them.

However, adults should certainly *not* rely on or expect children to disclose their experiences of abuse. Rather, as the testimony above illustrates, adults in sport must be prepared to accept that abuse does take place – including within their own cherished environments – and is often perpetrated by adults who appear committed to children and have the trust of those around them.

- Therefore, it is equally, if not more important, that adults in sport are sensitive to the behaviour of other adults that may indicate they are harming a child. Whilst not an exhaustive list, the following behaviour can be identified from the extracts above: Isolating children away from the view of others (e.g. in a car or office, in closed training-sessions)
- Controlling children and young people in various aspects (not restricted to sport and training)
- Denigrating a child (e.g. spreading rumours about a particular child’s behaviour or attitude)
- Engaging children in sexual talk (in person or otherwise)
- Normalizing sexual talks and behaviours towards children within a club (everybody knowing it, but nobody addressing it)

Clearly, such behaviour does not mean that sexual abuse is occurring, but all of these behaviours should raise concerns that should be acted upon.

## 5. Summary and outlook

The VOICE-project aimed at combatting sexual violence in sport through the voices of those affected. In order to reach this aim, a research study in seven European countries was conducted, collecting the accounts of 72 people who had experienced sexual violence in the field of sport. Although this qualitative interview study cannot claim to be representative, it is the most-encompassing qualitative study concerning this topic so far. This report summarizes some of the central results of the interviews, but is far from being complete. The 72 narratives of survivors are a very complex and rich resource of knowledge, the analysis of the interviews will still go on and further publications of the research-consortium will follow.

Looking back at the research process of the VOICE-project it can be concluded that conducting interviews with victims of sexual violence in sport was one of the most difficult tasks the participating researchers had to fulfil in their scientific lives so far. And at the same time many of us researchers felt that it was the most meaningful research project we had been involved in so far.

The extensive preparation of the interviews, including discussions with survivors and considering their recommendations for the interviews, as well as the deep-going reflections on ethical standards and the participative approach of the whole study were of utmost importance for the successful facilitation and quality of the interview process. Thus, the VOICE-study does not only generate knowledge on the topic of sexual violence itself but also relevant methodological insights which might be fertile for future research projects on similar topics.

The most important results of the VOICE-project are the narratives of the survivors themselves. They can stand alone as an outcome of the project and they are a rich body of knowledge for all those people who would like to learn more about the problem of sexual violence in sport and how to prevent it. This is why we decided to include 12 narratives of survivors into this report and did not segment these survivors' stories into thematic pieces. Through this approach we hope to offer the readers a possibility to fully capture the backgrounds and underlying conditions of sexual violence in sport as well as the impact on survivors' biographies. By offering this holistic approach we also hope that these accounts are recounted again and again, infiltrating our discourses and body of knowledge in sport and thus lifting the taboo of sexual violence in sport. It needs the survivors' stories to understand that sexual violence is a real societal problem also hitting the field of sport.

Qualitative research also must go beyond the individual case and this study searches for general patterns in the nature and forms of sexual violence in sport, its emergence and impact on those affected.

The study includes a variety of different forms of sexual violence in sport ranging from sexual violence without body contact over transgressive behaviours to sexual violence with body contact. The majority of the included cases represent the so-called severe sexual abuse with body contact during childhood or adolescence whereas forms of sexual harassment against youth or adults are less often reported in the study. 80% of the participants in the study experienced sexual violence as children or youth underpinning the requirement to better protect young athletes in sport. The majority of the included cases (63%) relate to sexual incidents occurring in sport clubs whereas other organisational contexts of the sport system (e.g. sports federations, Olympic training centers, boarding schools) are less often indicated as the site of violence within the study. Based



on this, it can be concluded that safeguarding activities should be implemented at all levels of the sport system, but are specifically important at the level of sport clubs which form the basis of organised sport in many European countries.

With regard to types of sport, it can be concluded that a diverse range of different sports were practiced by the victims participating in our project and although this study includes a relatively high share of cases in football (22%) and gymnastics (12%), it has to be stated that these numbers rather reflect the general quantitative participation rates in sport than the situation that one sport is more at risk for sexual violence than the other. Apart from this, female participants in the study experienced sexual violence significantly more often in individual sports, whereas male participants were more often victimized in team sports. Again, these results reflect the general gender ratios of sport participation.

Round about two thirds of the victims in the study are female and one third is male. The perpetrators in the reported incidents were almost always male and mostly adults. Only one of the 72 participants reported about a female offender. In the majority of the reports (78%) the perpetrator was the coach of the athlete, which underlines the necessity to spend specific attention to the adult/coach-child/athlete relation when implementing safeguarding procedures in sport.

The perpetrators are predominantly highly-renowned figures, who have either a very good reputation in the field of sport (e.g. as head coach) or a high social status in their life outside sport (e.g. in their professions). Although the descriptions of the offenders differ in characterizing them, two general patterns emerge from the interviews, namely the perpetrator as a "sympathetic friend" versus "the powerful authority figure". With regard to prevention and intervention strategies both "types" of offenders need to be considered, yet the first

one seems to be more difficult to identify as a possible risk for young athletes.

The field of sport fosters specific conditions and socio-cultural structures that are fundamental for the nature of sport, yet bear a risk for the emergence and concealment of sexual violence – this is what the stories of survivors reveal. First of all, the narratives confirm that there are sport-specific situations, such as changing, touching, massaging which convey an easy access to the body of athletes and these situations include risks for transgressive behaviours. Quite clearly the study shows that the wide-spread necessity for athletes of traveling to training as well as competitions implies also hazards when young athletes are alone with coaches or other adult persons driving them around in their cars. Safeguarding procedures in sport therefore should necessarily include clear instructions on young athletes' safety when traveling to and from sporting events.

Apart from these sport-specific situations, the study identified specific social structures in sport that bear risks for the development of sexual violence in sport as well as disguising or concealing it. The culture of hegemonic masculinity in sport contributes to the emergence of sexual harassment and abuse on a very fundamental level, when sexualised comments and behaviours are normalized in the field of sport and young boys are introduced into this culture through certain practices and rituals by adult role models in sport. This male hegemony does not only discriminate girls and women in sport (e.g. via sexualised comments), it may also lead to the victimization of male athletes, which is even more difficult to perceive since this irritates the normativity of male superiority.

The sport communities often stand for a strong culture of trust, loyalty and family which conceals sexual violence as unseen and makes it very difficult for the victims to disclose. Furthermore, the typical selection processes in sport – to be the chosen one for a team – and

the invested hard work as well as the strong commitment to their sport often hinder the victims of sexual violence to speak out and seek help. In some of the VOICE-reports, especially in those from the field of high elite sport, it becomes evident, that the coaches and their entourage run a chilly climate based on strong control methods and disciplining regimes, which estrange the young athletes from their self-determination and subordinate them to the will of the coach. Although it can be hoped that such reactionary training methods are not used anymore in modern competitive sport based on pedagogical principles of an autonomous athlete, the stories of survivors in this study clearly show the need that safeguarding procedures should combat such inhumane practices in elite sport for children and youth.

Looking at the voices of the survivors in sport and on what we can learn from their perspective about the impact that sexual violence had on their lives, the VOICE-study shows that there are many reasons why individuals do not disclose experiences of sexual violence in sport. As we have seen, victims frequently experience feelings of guilt, shame and anxiety and the challenges of managing these feelings can manifest in a wide range of mental health issues and problematic coping strategies, such as withdrawal from friends and family, self-harming, eating disorders, truancy, anti-social or violent behaviour, reliance on alcohol or drugs. There are several cases in this study, where sexual violence has resulted in suicide-attempts and research in this field, over many years, has shown that sexual violence can have a serious and long-term impact on the psychological wellbeing of those who experience it. This was confirmed by the survivors' reports in this study.

There are also many inter-personal and situational factors which make it very difficult for victims to disclose, for example, when an abuser is a respected and valued member of the community as is often the case in this study. In

sport, an athlete's career is highly dependent on the coach and the power imbalance between the child/athlete and the adult/coach provides an ideal context for abuse to occur. However, children in sport are instructed to listen to and respect the coach and those that do so are likely to proceed from one level to the next. Therefore, speaking out against a coach, about anything let alone the taboo issue of sexual abuse, is virtually impossible for the young athlete who wants to succeed.

The messages for prevention are very clear from this study. In many of the reported cases the social environment was blind to the signs that might have made it possible to detect the abuse, either because the adults were not sensitive towards the topic or because they did not want to register the signs and stand up against the abuse. Therefore, it can be concluded that sport contexts, especially those where children are present, should be open and transparent environments that are underpinned and guided by clear standards and codes for behaviour. They should also be open for examination and review in relation to these standards and criteria should be established that enable others (such as parents) to independently assess the extent to which sport organisations (at all levels) prioritize the welfare of children. Adults need to pay close attention to the children's welfare and need to listen seriously to them.

Central to this effort must be the mainstreaming of children's rights in sport and the creation of sport environments that value children for themselves *as they are*, not simply for what they might become. In the words of Celia Brackenridge, we must value children in sport as human's *being*, not just as human's *doing*.

## Epilogue by Colin Harris

As a victim of sexual abuse in sport this is an important opportunity to share with a wider audience 'the story' of my involvement with the VOICE project. I am 62 years old and a former footballer with Chelsea F.C. In November 2016, after long and difficult discussions with my family I disclosed that I had been abused by the youth coach at the club in the 1970s. It is important to point out that this was the first time I had ever spoken about the abuse.

Having disclosed I had a strong desire to become involved in positive changes that would benefit and help those who have been affected by past abuses within sport and to affect changes that would positively benefit those currently in and those moving into sport. Given the unprecedented coverage in the British press post Andy Woodward's disclosure of abuse in football, I had imagined that this would be a relatively straightforward process and that the governing bodies and relevant organisations would be only too pleased to engage with victims of abuse to help inform and shape policy.

During the period after I disclosed I spoke to many organisations. Initially I felt optimistic and that I was being taken seriously. For a brief period, I had the impression that there was a genuine desire for change and that I could be part of that change process. However, some months on I had to face the distressing reality that this was not about to happen. It seemed that these organisations were just *talking to me* and that was the extent of it. There was no follow up and no engagement – just a painful and demeaning silence. I felt that my voice was being lost, buried.

My first encounter with the VOICE project was by chance, a fellow victim of sexual abuse suggested that I contact Dr. Mike Hartill (VOICE UK lead). After some consideration I did so – but with a heavy heart – my previous experiences had taught me to be sceptical. However, it soon became clear from my discussions with Mike that the VOICE project was attempting to

address what I felt was happening to me – *a silencing process* – where authorities attempt to 'silence' or 'bury' the voices of victims of sexual abuse. Also, the dominant aim of the project – *to put the voices of those who had suffered sexual violence at the centre of change* – chimed with my original desire to become part of a process of change. Mike invited me to give a talk about my experiences at the VOICE UK Acknowledgement forum in June 2017. This was the first time I had spoken in public about my experiences.

Since the Nottingham conference my relationship with the VOICE project has developed. I have been given many opportunities to become involved in areas of activity which were unexpected and challenging. Opportunities that have allowed me to use *my voice* to help combat sexual violence in sport. Towards the end of June 2016, I was asked to help develop some short films to be used on the project website and social media. These films have been widely used, for example, by the Child Protection in Sport Unit UK (to promote discussions around disclosure and safeguarding issues) and Sport England – who posted one of the films to all their 80,000 members.

Also, as a result of the Nottingham Conference, Sport England (the national funding body for sport in England) has set up an Independent Advisory Panel on which I sit alongside other 'survivors'. The aim of the panel is to involve 'survivors' in the development of safeguarding initiatives across sport. I have also been consulted by the CPSU on various aspects of their safeguarding policy. At the end of September 2017, I was invited to speak at the VOICE-workshop at the German Sport University in Cologne. In Cologne I filmed interviews for German and Belgian documentaries. Both documentaries were shown in November 2017. My association with VOICE also led to an invitation to speak at the first conference of *Safe Sport International* in Madrid in April 2018, a consequence of which I have been invited to speak at the Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires

and to participate in their initiatives to prevent sexual violence in sport.

Beyond my personal involvement with the VOICE project something more profound has occurred. As I hope I have illustrated above with examples of the opportunities the project has created for me, the VOICE project has become an acknowledged forum in Europe and beyond where the power of survivors' voices is now recognised. Survivors' voices are now seen as 'legitimate'; survivors' testimonies have been used to create greater acknowledgment of the issue of sexual violence in sport; and survivors' voices are now viewed as a vital part of developing strategies for preventing sexual violence. The importance of these changes must not be underestimated.

It is apt at this point to revisit the circumstances of my disclosure. This was a very traumatic time emotionally and difficult for my family – we were stepping into the unknown. A prime motivation for disclosing was to affect positive change and to ensure that what happened to me was less likely to happen in the future. I turned to institutions I thought would enable me to achieve this and felt thwarted, silenced. Only since my involvement with VOICE have I felt that *my voice was truly being heard and that my desire to affect change was a real possibility*. Institutions, that I had originally felt thwarted by, have *now embraced the VOICE project and embraced me*. For example, the governing body of my sport – the English Football Association (FA) – attended the final VOICE conference in Cologne. They are very keen to view and use the educational resources that have been developed by the project. I am now involved with them in developing policies relating to the care of those who have suffered sexual abuse in football. On their website they positively promote the VOICE project:

*'The FA has backed a Europe-wide safeguarding project which is closely linked with our own work in the UK'*

Reflecting on my involvement with VOICE I have a sense of real upward momentum. When I first became involved with VOICE my experiences up until then had led me to believe that it was unlikely that I would be able to affect change. What I perceived as 'rejection' was having a negative effect on my mental health and led me to consider quietly fading away into the background and to let things be. The project has sustained my involvement and has become an important part of my life. It has afforded me the opportunity to speak at many forums in the UK, Europe and South America and led to my involvement with governing bodies as part of the process of affecting change. It has also allowed me to develop and has engendered a feeling of accomplishment which has to some extent helped me to cope with the longer-term effects of the abuse. *My voice has neither been lost nor buried.*

But most importantly I feel that the VOICE-project has created an unstoppable movement across nations and sports that will have a long-term effect on how we view and develop policy aimed at preventing sexual abuse in sport.

*Colin Harris*

## Epilogue by Karen Leach

A few years ago, I was very sick, I was struggling to stay alive because of what had happened to me as a child in swimming. I received a call from Mike Hartill, we talked about the VOICE-project and what his hope and dreams were for it. Then he asked me would I like to get involved, would I like to become an Ambassador for the VOICE-project. I did not have to think for a second, my answer was YES. So, began a new part of my life.

After that phone call with Mike, my life began to change for the better. Since the publication of my story in 'Deep Deception: Irelands Swimming Scandals' by Justine McCarthy I have been speaking out. I had been trying to have my Voice heard for so long, but no one was listening to me. This was more hurt and abuse for me.

The VOICE-project has given me my Voice back, it has given me a reason to be alive, I have got my freedom, my voice has been heard and I have been listened to. I have been respected and valued for my life and for what happened to me. The people that I have been involved with in this project never turned their back on me, once they heard my story, they have stayed and supported me as I have grown stronger and become well again.

The VOICE-project has given so many of us an opportunity to speak out, it has created a place for people with lived experience to be safe, to be free and to be able to talk about what happened to them. It has created fantastic friendships and lifelong connections for all of us.

We now know that we are not on our own, that we have a place in life. That we mean something, that we have an important message that must be heard. We know what will keep children safe because we know what would have kept us safe.

Everyone who attended the Final Conference in Germany would have seen and felt the huge connection people had there, who had never met before, we all had one thing in common.

We were all abused as children in our sport. We came from many different sports from all over Europe. 72 people came forward to share their heart-breaking story of their broken life of what happened to them as children. 24 people came to The Final Conference to stand up and have their Voice heard at the start of the conference. I was so proud to be a part of this, gaining our freedom, getting our voices back, being heard, being listened to, standing together, standing tall, speaking out.

We have all survived, we all came with one message: Please protect and keep children and young people safe in sports. I ask please don't let any other person end up with a life like mine.

There are many of us who now want to work in this area with organisations and governments to ensure that children and young people are at the front of everything, in order to be safe in sports. Children and young people must always be FIRST no matter what.

So much has been achieved by the VOICE-project throughout Europe, not only on a research basis, it has changed people's lives.

Unless Abuse comes to your door, you will never know the true deep pain and hurt it causes.

This must not be the end for VOICE or the people that have worked so hard to create it. Mike's dream has touched the world of sport and the lives of many, Bettina our wonderful leader, Gitta our email master. Kevin and Sheila from *NWG*. Duncan from *Survivors Manchester* minding us during the conference.

Gloria and Colin now my very special dear friends. Everyone who worked so hard to make this all happen. To each and every special sports person who shared your life with us and had your voice heard. From my heart I thank you all for everything, you have all changed my life.

The VOICE-project needs to be kept alive, there are many others who need what the VOICE has to offer. This is up to the people in power to fund this project and keep it going. Children

and young people FIRST, must be at the front of everything for organisations and governments.

Your Voice – Your Life – Your Truth.

*Karen Leach*

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# Attachments

## **I. Information Sheet & Consent Form (Interview Study)**

The title of this project is:

### **VOICE**

**Voices for truth & dignity: Combatting sexualised violence in European sport through the voices of those affected**

This project is led by

**Address:**

*[Address and Name of respective University /researcher]*

The project is part of a collaborative partnership of universities, sport and victim organisations within the European Union. The overall project is led by the German Sport University in Cologne. Seven countries are involved into the project.

**Approval for this project has been granted by:**

The European Commission; Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency [project number: 567129-EPP-1-2015-2-DE-SPO-SCP]

**For further information, please contact:**

*[Name, email-Adress and telephone number of national researcher]*

**Background Information:**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. This is obviously a sensitive piece of research and I hope, I have already answered any queries or concerns you may have.

The information included here is intended to be a recap and written record of our previous discussion(s). However, please read all the information carefully and take further time to consider your participation in this project. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign this form.

**Aims of the project**

The main aims of the project are:

- to develop understanding about the nature and impact of sexualised violence in sport;
- to promote the acknowledgement of sexualised violence within the European sports community;
- to develop preventative resources.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity**

As already discussed, you do not have to take part, but if you do, your participation will be confidential and known only to myself and a senior person within [name of victim-support organisation]. Your identity will not be shared with any facilitating third party without your written consent.

If you decide that you do not want to participate, there will be no disadvantage to you nor will you be asked to explain your decision.

**Summary of Procedure**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to take part in one or more interview(s) with myself. The interview(s) will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. The focus of these interviews will be your life history, particularly your experiences with sexual harassment and abuse within sport or Physical Education.

**Interviewing**

The amount of time spent on this is entirely up to you, however, I would anticipate at least one interview of approximately 2-4 hours. The time and location of the interviews is your choice, although a quiet/discreet location is preferable, and I would expect to travel to meet you. Alternatively I can reimburse your travel costs. Please be aware that we cannot pay any further fees or honorariums for the interview.

Your participation is on a voluntary basis, you can change your mind and decide not to take part at any time during the interview. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give any reasons for your decision, and you will not be placed at any disadvantage whatsoever. You can also withdraw any and all data collected at any point up to eight weeks after the final interview.

While not exhaustive, the points below illustrate the sorts of topics/areas we might discuss:

- family background and general childhood experiences;
- what sport(s) you were involved in;

- ❑ the perpetrator(s) and their relationship to you;
- ❑ how the sexual activity/harassment/abuse began and what it entailed;
- ❑ how you dealt with it;
- ❑ how it affected you and those around you;
- ❑ whether you told anyone;
- ❑ whether you received any professional help;
- ❑ what you suggest to sport organisations in order to improve prevention,
- ❑ how you reflect upon it now.

### ***Recording & Transcription***

You will receive a copy of the audio recording. The audio will be transcribed and both files will be stored securely. You will be assigned a pseudonym and your identity will only be known by myself and a senior person within [*name of victim-support organisation*].

During transcription, any identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts. The final anonymised transcript will be shared with the project team. Transcription may be conducted by a research assistant (RA). Where this is the case you will be informed. The RA will be contractually obligated to uphold the terms of this agreement.

All audio-interview data will be destroyed on completion of the project. However, the final anonymised written transcript will be retained for further 10 years by the project lead in your country (see above).

Your interview transcript will be used as part of a national research report and also a European research report.

### ***Publication***

The transcript of your interview may be used, in whole or in part, within research publications, such as journal articles, reports or books and these may be accessible via the internet. As mentioned above, all the transcripts are anonymised so that it is not possible to identify you as a person.

### ***Information that may lead to the prevention of a crime***

Transcripts and any and all resulting publications will be thoroughly anonymised, including the identity of people you refer to and place names, etc. However, if specific evidence is given that authorities may use to prevent harm to a person, I will be bound by the terms of this agreement to ensure this information is reported to the appropriate authorities.

Where such information is disclosed, I would encourage you to officially report it. If you did not wish to do so, I would pass on the relevant detail but your identity would not be disclosed (as far as permissible by law). However, it is important to note that research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege and may be liable to subpoena. If subpoenaed I would be bound to disclose your identity.

### ***Risks, Benefits & Outputs***

There is the possibility that you may experience distress through your involvement in this research and you should consider this carefully before proceeding to the interview stage. We are working with a recognized support agency who are available for you.

There are no direct rewards from participating in this study, however, by taking part, it is anticipated that you will help to increase knowledge of an issue that is often hidden and is also under-researched. It is intended that this knowledge be used to help develop understanding of this issue, to inform policy and ultimately to help prevent sexualised violence.

The project also involves the staging of **Acknowledgement Forums** (similar to a 'Truth Commission') designed to bring the stories of those affected by sexualised violence to those who work within sport and the organisations responsible for sports governance. An invitation to participate in/attend this national forum will be extended to all research participants and I will be happy to provide further details and discuss this with you.

The stories gathered through the research interviews will also be used to produce **practical resources** aimed at educating the European sports community about the problem of sexualised violence. I will also explain this further during the interview process. Of course it is your own and free decision to engage in any further steps of the project. You may reject any further engagement without any disadvantage.

In case, there are any questions left, do not hesitate to contact me and discuss with me.

Finally, I would like to ask you to sign the following page.

## Statement by participant

I have read this form and I consent to participate in this research study on the basis that:

- My participation is voluntary and without material benefit to me;
- I know I can stop taking part at any time without question;
- I understand that any information disclosed by me that could reasonably be used to prevent the abuse of a child will be passed on to the relevant authorities;
- I understand that research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege and may be liable to subpoena;
- I have been informed of the arrangements for storage of my interview data, I am satisfied with those arrangements, and I participate on the understanding that these arrangements will be followed exactly;
- The research may be published, but it will not be linked to me;
- I will be provided with the audio recording of my interview(s);
- I have the right to remove any and all of my data from the study prior to publication up to eight weeks after the final interview;
- I have been able to discuss the possible risks involved;
- I have been provided with contact details for sources of professional support;
- I agree to inform the researcher if I feel unduly distressed or wish to stop or take a break;
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

## Participant

Name (printed):

Signature:

Date:

## Researcher

Name (printed):

Signature:

Date:



## **II. Interview Protocol**

### ***Preparation***

The research must be approved by the researcher's institution, e.g. the ethics commissions.

### ***Victim-support/survivor organisation***

Interviewers must have engaged in detailed discussion about their plans for interviewing with a victim-support/survivor organisation (minimum of one meeting 'in-person'); in this meeting the victim-support/survivor organisation informs the interviewer about the needs for protecting the interviewees in the process of taking the interview. A detailed explanation on possible risks (e.g. risks of retraumatisation) and how to prevent them / deal with them will also be part of the discussion. Interviewers will have an elementary understanding of trauma in the context of the interview process.

There must be a clear and documented line of communication between the interviewer and the victim-support organisation and agreements reached on how support will be provided for the interviewee and the interviewer. The interviewer should be able to have their support organisation or individual present at the interview if they wish. This also includes concrete appointments on how a support back-up during the interview is guaranteed.

### ***Informed consent***

The interviewer must engage in a process of gaining informed consent with any potential interviewee (see Consent Form); the interview will not start without the signing of the informed consent by both (interviewee and interviewer). This process must involve discussion of the potential risks to the interviewee, including limits to confidentiality, and arrangements for safeguarding their wellbeing.

Prior to interview, the interviewer must establish the extent of therapeutic support/counselling the interviewee has received and the current arrangements the interviewee has in place (if any). This should be clarified in e.g. a telephone conversation. It will be made clear to the participant that the researcher is unable to fulfil the role of therapeutic support. If the interviewee has not received therapeutic support, the interviewer should provide contact details of professional support organisations and carefully assess whether to proceed with the interview based on discussion with the participant and the victim-support partner organisation.

The consent form will ask the interviewee to notify the interviewer of any adverse effects experienced, during or after interview, and any support required or accessed.

### ***The interview setting***

The interviewer should carefully plan the setting of the interview in order to facilitate an adequate atmosphere for the interviewee.

Directions for interviewers:

- Let the interviewee decide on the setting of the interview (e.g. place, constellation).
- Offer an adequate room for the interview, e.g. a quiet and comfortable room at a victim support organisation or at university, but let the interviewee freely decide where the interview takes place. Alternative rooms may be a café, if it provides enough privacy, or the interviewee's private home.
- If the interview is scheduled to take place in the interviewee's private home, the safety of the interviewer needs to be considered. In these situations two interviewers or an accompanying person should be preferred. Where this is not possible, the interviewer should consult with the victim support organisation, the project coordinator or a designated other.
- The setting of the interview should not replicate the trauma-setting, e.g. gyms or rooms in the context of sport clubs might not be appropriate.
- Ask the interviewee whether she or he wants to bring a supporting person to the interview and facilitate arrangements for this.

### ***Interview***

The interviewer **listens** to the interviewee's report. The interviewee decides if and how his/her story is told.

The interviewer asks open questions and gives the interviewee the chance to explicate their perspective.

The rejection of a narrative about a traumatic event may cause a retraumatization. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the interviewer avoids any signs of rejecting or contesting the narrative of the traumatic experiences. The interviewer must not question or doubt in any way the veracity of the interviewee's account. The interviewer does not ask for plausibility or evidence, since the interview has not the purpose of detecting the truth in a criminological sense.

Directions for interviewers:

- listen closely
- do not interrupt the narrative
- do not ask for evidence
- do not doubt the narrative
- show acceptance and empathy
- if you cannot follow the narrative, ask politely whether the interviewee could tell again

The interviews do not follow therapeutic goals. Yet the interview should facilitate a setting that helps the interviewees to stay within **their "window of tolerance"**. For the interviewer this means to balance the situation and show significant interest in the narrative, but to avoid hyperarousal by pushing the interviewee or being voyeuristic.

Directions for interviewers:

- The interviewee decides on how his or her story is told.
- The interviewer offers options via a "schedule of areas for discussion", but the interviewee decides if and how the interviewer's questions are answered.
- The interviewer shows empathy, but remains calm.

- The interviewer does not push the interviewee into the direction of telling details about the experiences of sexual violence but should invite the interviewee to describe the experience to whatever extent they feel comfortable with. The pre-interview discussion should explain this approach so that the interviewee can consider this beforehand.
- The interviewer checks at appropriate intervals, during and after the interview, how the interviewee feels and whether the interviewer wants a break/ wants to stop/ needs support from a therapeutic expert.

There is no fixed list of symptoms the interviewees might show when they have left their “window of tolerance”.

Yet, the interviewers should be watchful, if their interviewee shows the following signs:

- disorganised and inconsistent story-telling
- the conversation freezes and the interviewee has problems to continue
- the interviewee seems to be disconnected, does not react to questions
- a fixed gaze
- rapid bodily agitation (e.g. moving back and forward, shifting feet, rubbing arms/body parts, biting lips ...)
- ...

If any of these signs arise within the interview, the interviewer should ask the interviewee whether he/she needs a break, wants to stop, and/or needs to consult supporting back-up.

The following directions might help to stabilize the interviewee:

- verbal reassurance (“it’s okay, you do not have to go on”/ “I can fully understand that you are excited, ...” / “Do you want a break?” ...)
- offer a drink of water
- open window
- offer possibilities for action, e.g. “Let’s stand up” / “Let’s go for a walk”
- try to avoid bodily contact (no hugging, no caressing)
- ...

In the event that a participant becomes distressed during interview, the interviewer will immediately make available telephone/skype access to a victim-support organisation helpline or accompanies the interviewee to a professional support unit. However, this eventuality will have already been discussed with the participant before and contact details for such organisations will be provided to the participant prior to interview.

### ***Post-Interview***

The interviewer will discuss arrangements for keeping the interviewee informed about the progress of the project and establish an agreed schedule for contact.

Recordings will be transcribed, verbatim, as soon after the interview as possible (typically within a few weeks of the interview) and the transcript will be securely shared with the interviewee. Comments, amendments and clarifications will be documented.

The interviewee may withdraw the interview up to 10 weeks after the interview.

There should be a debrief programme for the interviewers to address any potential secondary trauma. If possible, the interviewer should arrange for supervision.

**IMPRINT****EU-funded project VOICE  
VOICES for truth and dignity**

Combatting sexual violence in European Sport through  
the voices of those affected

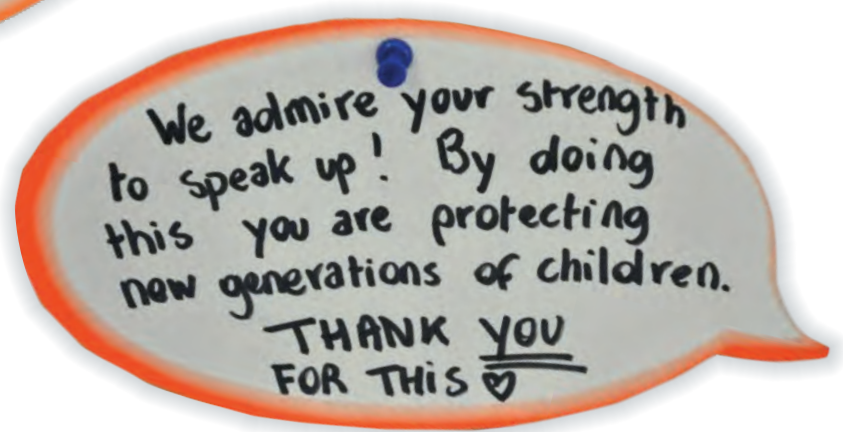
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